NARCOTICS AND WILD BIRDS

by Woodman

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR | FRIDAY, JUNE 17th, 1955 | 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

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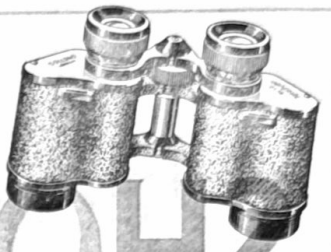

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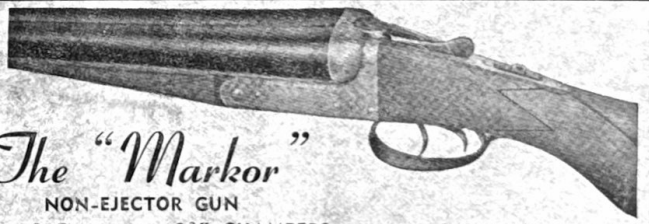

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

AT this time of the year the work of keepers is too easily forgotten. Yet what with the hatching out of game and all the highly-important duties involved at this vital turning point of the early summer, a keeper's services just now are invaluable. The former "Velveteens" is doing a grand job of work "behind some leafy screen." He is surely out of sight, but he should not for that reason be out of mind.

Village life in this country has changed since the days of the squire, and it is an unfortunate fact that there is a greater tendency to look towards the town or city for ideas and guidance. It is felt, however, that so much of the character and stability of the individual derives from the country way of life that it should be jealously guarded and preserved. As the Duke of Edinburgh recently pointed out in one of his famous utterances, we do not all want to belong to office and factory and become like so many "beans in a row." Surely it is better to take a chance than to play for safety all the time. And to us it has appeared that the keeper is a man who has elected to pursue a life of individuality rather than become one of a crowd. If only for this he should be encouraged to make the most of his chosen career.

It is not then fair that a keeper should be neglected during the close season. Nor should touch be maintained merely through the post. Personal contact is essential between shooting tenant and keeper, and it is necessary for a shoot to be visited at regular intervals. There is a tendency today for the non-resident tenant of a shoot to maintain no more than a nominal interest in his preserves over the breeding season. This is tantamount to regarding a shoot as just another recreation ground.

The "dyed-in-the-wool" shooting man will look upon his shoot in a very different light no matter whether he is landlord or tenant. Every corner of every field, every tree almost, will convey some happy association. And the living spirit of it all will be embodied in the keeper—that sturdy caretaker of field and covert, to whom a friendly visit can mean a day to remember. It is the human touch which counts.

In any case the keeper's life is a comparatively solitary one. It is only on shooting days that he enjoys much company and shooting days are full of responsibility. One condition cancels out another and it is safe to assume that the keeper's life is no sinecure. As a writer who once became a keeper said —it is a sure way to develop rheumatism! All the same the call of the woods is too strong to resist and to the man who needs freedom and the spice of adventure the call will be answered. Such qualities surely merit recognition and it is nothing short of a duty of a tenant to keep personal touch. Distances may be long, but if a tenant can come for one thing, he can come for another.

It is well appreciated that all these suggestions, and many more besides, *are* carried out to the full. But there exist tenants who seem to lose interest once actual shooting is over. Which is scarcely good enough.

* * *

COARSE FISHING

The coarse fishing season opened on Thursday, and this week-end will see hundreds of thousands of anglers at the waterside, eager to renew the thrills of angling for the dozen or so species classified in law as "freshwater fish." Probably a majority of the anglers will fish in the many matches arranged for this week-end, for match fishing has become immensely popular with artisan anglers. It demands very skilful technique, and the money awards to the winners are no chicken-feed. Match fishing culminates in the N.F.A.'s annual match in September, where the individual winner may go home the richer by more than £2,000. In September, too, teams from the Continent are being entertained, for the International Angling Championship (held in Italy in 1953 and in Germany in 1954) is this year being fished in this country. Though the majority of anglers out on the first week-end of the season may be match anglers, it is a majority only by a narrow margin, and the very large minority is composed of anglers who fished as Walton fished — alone or in the company of a few congenial friends. They will fish everywhere and in anything that holds fish, from the smallest pond to the Royalty Fishery at Christchurch, the latter being undoubtedly the finest coarse fishery in Europe.

CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

There used to be occasional Press references to the giant buffaloes of Northern Australia (sometimes to be compared with the wild camels of Southern Spain) as curiosities of semi-natural history, but in the latest account the buffaloes are described as a plague. These overgrown descendants of beasts originally imported from Timor as work animals are now so numerous (one estimate puts them at over 65,000) and so ferocious as to be a serious nuisance, and the Australian Government desires that some thousands should be killed every year. Their hides are worth about £5 or £6 each for such "heavy leather" uses as the manufacture of the substantial machinery belts. At first glance, it is one of the paradoxes of our time that, while we are more concerned about both the preservation of wild life than ever before, we also hear more and more of animals being pests or plagues. The red deer of Scotland and the bullfinches of the Home Counties are merely other features in the same picture, which includes also elephants in Africa and elk in America. But the paradox is only superficial or apparent and not real for the background against which the animals stand is essentially the same. Mankind is increasing in numbers and appetite, and thus presses ever more widely and intensively on the surface of the globe in his efforts to produce food and other goods to meet his needs and satisfy his desires for a higher standard of living. The Australian buffaloes illustrate incidentally another familiar point: today more machines and fewer animals are used in cultivations and transport. Hence also the unwanted surplus of "wild" horses in Australia and North America, animals destined to be either a nuisance, or leather, dog-food and glue.

NEW NATURE RESERVES IN WALES

The Nature Conservancy has declared three important new Nature Reserves in Wales, to be known as the Cader Idris, the Cors Tregaron, and the Newborough Warren and Guys Llanddwyn reserves. The three areas are of sharply contrasting types. One consists of wild mountain scenery; another of peat-bog through which a river threads itself; and the third is a stretch of sand-dune, hard to match at any rate in the southern half of Britain, for remoteness and freedom from human interference. About half-way up Cader, at about 1,500ft., lies Llyn Cau (the Hollow Lake). It is best approached by a path leaving the road about a mile from the head of Tal-y-Llyn lake. This leads one scrambling up across a belt of deciduous woodland, through which tumbles a loudly singing stream. Once through the wood the path leads along the flank of a curving valley of rough moorland, until at last in its sombre setting is reached the black water of Llyn Cau.

A FAMOUS BOG

Cors Tregaron, about 12 miles south-east of Aberystwyth, is officially described as "the best actively-growing, raised bog in England and Wales," and the river Teifi runs through its length. The extent of the reserve is 1,500 acres. The bog has much to interest naturalists. It is a haunt of the polecat, and white-fronted geese use it as a wintering ground. Third of the new reserves, Newborough Warren, lies at the extreme southern point of Anglesey, alongside the entrance to the Menai Straits. This area is a halt for many wading birds on migration. As for animals, there were frequent signs of moles, and the bones of many rabbits killed by myxomatosis. And that poses a serious question. What will be the effect of their absence on vegetation? Will delicate flowers now so profusely growing here, give way to coarser vegetation?

NORTHANTS TROUT

Trout of more than 10lb. in weight are good but not really exceptional fish in Scotland and Ireland. Even in England, a few such fish are taken on baits or lures. A trout weighing 10¼lb. taken *on fly* in England deserves a place in angling history, for though such things have happened in the past a great many years have passed since a fish of this weight fell to a fly. This particular fish was caught by Mr. C. Inwood, an experienced all-round angler, in the Eye Brook Reservoir, Northamptonshire, on Whit Monday. The fly on which it was caught was a large butcher.

The Cult of Bird-Watching

by Tower-Bird

ON the afternoon of Whitsun Bank Holiday I took a walk across a wide expanse of private marshland, hoping to see at least something of the results of my war against the local population of carrion crows. For I like to give myself just a little credit for the very many hours I have spent in shooting and otherwise destroying the black corvine so-and-sos which make heavy inroads among the eggs of game birds and duck.

And, should you ask me what iota of credit I do claim, I will show you the snake-like head of a mallard sitting hard among the rushes or grasses, or on the top of a pollarded willow, and tell you that it is just possible this bird was hatched from an egg last year which could have been "supped" by a crow—had I not shot the latter on the nest while she herself was incubating a clutch of eggs. Or, more likely, I will take you to a small flight-pond, or to a marshland drain, and there flush a mallard duck, which will fly, calling loudly, low out across the grass, suddenly to flop on to the ground with a "broken wing"; what time a dozen little ducklings will paddle urgently on the surface of the water, under the bank, and dive out of sight. Dive and vanish as though swallowed, the lot of them, by a pike. It is true that the old bird — now contradicting herself and on wing again, circling round only a foot or so above the ground — might have brought off her brood without my aid; but it is equally feasible that her eggs might have been found and eaten by one of the score of crows I shot within a mile of her nesting site.

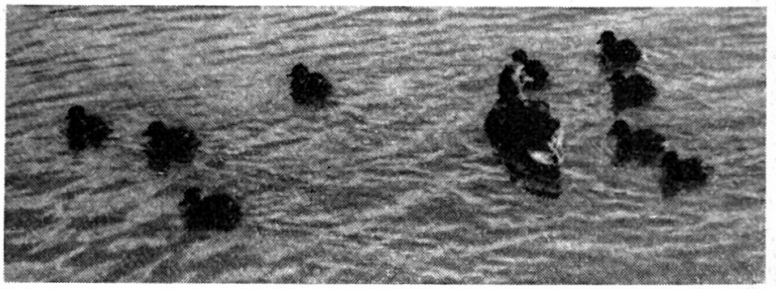
Therefore, I can say, without fear of contradiction, that anyone (including myself) who kills many crows on a duck marsh is perfectly entitled to take some credit at least for the improved stock of mallard in the vicinity. And even if many of the duck clear off to private lakes and other waters before the duck shooting season starts this year on September 1, we are assured of two things—that they will benefit shooters of duck elsewhere, and that other duck (perhaps saved from crows by other good sportsmen) will come to our marshes in autumn and winter to fill the gap made by many departures of local-bred birds.

A Quiet Walk Round

So, on Whit Monday, I had a quiet walk round, armed only with a telescope. It was not very long before I had come across two broods of ducklings; one of seven, and one of thirteen, so far as I was able to count the little perishers. But the quite surprising sight which did these old eyes good was a sudden flush, from an exceptionally marshy spot among the buttercup-golden pasture, of a batchelor party of no less than forty-seven mallard; a party which, on getting into the air, broke up into two (a thirty-seven and a ten), flew round for a bit, then settled again out in the marsh less than half-a-mile away. Lying on the flood-bank, I watched their flight through the glass, while Don kept his eyes on them until they had gone down out of sight.

For another twenty minutes or so we continued our stroll, seeing one or two pairs of plover with young, and two pairs of redshank, to say nothing of smaller fry (wagtails, etc.) and a considerable number of pigeon in small flocks not exceeding fifty birds. The only other surprise was caused by a "school" of some dozen black-headed gulls feeding among a scattered flock of pigeon.

We were on our way back home, when I spied at a distance a couple of people walking bang across the open bit of marsh towards where I had seen the mallard go down. I immediately got them in the telescope, to find that one was a man with a large pair of binoculars and what looked like a camera slung across his shoulders; the other, a woman in slacks and a white blouse. I watched their progress carefully, for I cannot believe, knowing what I do, that they had permission to be on this ground. Very soon the mallard were on wing, again splitting into the two parties, and I saw the man watching them carefully through his glasses. Obviously here was a pair of bird-watchers, if not bird photographers, and in turn they were watched for a considerable time. I still do not know quite what they were up to, except it became obvious, as they "worked" that area of the marsh like a couple of predators, that they were looking for a nest, or the plural. I think some bird (a snipe, or duck) must have been almost walked on, for, at one point, their search narrowed to a very small area of ground. A little later, something else must have flushed, for, after a search, the woman stayed as a "mark" on one side of a drain, while her companion walked a good way round to a spot where he could now reach the other side, when he carefully went to work some yards from where the woman was facing.



An old mallard duck with her brood of "little perishers."

Damaging Searchers

There came to my mind, then, the thought that they might be looking for the nest of a pair of garganey. Two seasons ago, when two pairs nested near here, the fact was published in an ornithological paper, and many searchers were out, and the police warned off some who were doing damage to standing grass crops. Anyway, whoever they were, and whatever they were doing, their wanderings and behaviour made my hackles rise.

Now, I am myself a keen amateur ornithologist, and I fully recognise the joys and interests of those of similar tastes. My full sympathies lie with keen though very amateur bird-watchers who like to get abroad in the country and on the coast to make a genuine study of birds. But bird-watchers, like wildfowlers, should regard their responsibilities which, roughly, are to recognise the rights of private property and to do no harm to nesting birds and particularly to rare visitors. The cult of bird-watching (?) by organised parties of bird-watchers, arriving by coach, or on a score of bicycles from the towns, is a very bad thing indeed, particularly as few of them have any what I will term "bird sense," and certainly no respect for private property. No rare bird is allowed any privacy, and is quickly chivvied away, while bands of these people trample through standing grass, or trample and disturb countless nests of ground-nesting common birds, from those of the pheasant, partridge, and duck, to those of smaller birds.

I know a number of responsible bird-watchers who go out alone and in pairs, even in fowling weather, and, though they may misunderstand the ethics of sport, and may even dislike any man who carries a gun, they are yet good bird-watchers and will harm neither birds nor nests, nor yet trespass without permission. But I am by no means friendly disposed towards either the general "cult" of bird-watchers in "flocks," or even towards such hunting pairs of them as I watched on Whit Monday. They do more harm to bird life than the predators we shoot in defence of nesting birds.

Bird Counts

Nor, as a good countryman, do I, personally, agree with having so many amateur bird-watchers "making counts." A properly organised body of ornithologists may find the need for so doing, but, to my mind, the value of probably the majority of reports sent in by amateurs is almost nil, and when these are included, as they too often are, in county bird reports, I sadly shake my head. I am well aware that the compilers of such reports are forced to "employ" such watchers, and that, good bird men themselves, they do their best not to accept doubtful reports, but sift the wheat from the chaff to the best of their ability.

All the same, many of the bird-watchers I have met who make these counts have a very great deal to learn. Many are "competitive," often reporting species which are not, in fact, of that species, although they like to give themselves the "benefit of the doubt." I have talked with youthful bird-watchers "making counts" and realised, within minutes, that they knew very little about their subject. I have stood beside them and asked them to identify this and that bird passing by, and have, at times, been horrified at their ignorance. I have seen their "work" given in print as authentic. And it is not for me to find out for whom their reports are being compiled, or to write to those for whom they are reporting. I have quite enough to do! But I am often sickened by my observations of "members of the cult," and by articles and notes which some of them contribute to their local Press and elsewhere.

I hope, one day, that some form of committee, or county committees, will come into being, on which genuine shooting men and genuine ornithologists will combine to thrash out these vexed problems, and to stamp out the present bad elements, which not only cause friction between them, but do incalculable harm to the interests of resident and visiting bird life.

Sportsmen of all kinds who like to "rest in comfort" will be interested in the recent introduction by Hill & Co. (Tools) Ltd. of Polgate—they are the Hill-Rest seat and the Hill-Sling seat. Both are folding seats made of tubular steel and fitted with tripod legs.

The Hill-Rest has a back to it for additional comfort which operates as a handle for carrying about when folded. The whole weighs 2¼lb., and is retailed at £6 19s., including P.T. The Hill-Sling is a simpler seat fitted with a sling which permits it to be slung from the shoulder—the seat itself being made of close grain cowhide—its weight is 1¼lb., and its price £3 2s. 6d., including P.T.

Ranworth Old Hall and fully-winged, tame grey-lag geese.

A Shooting Paradise—XXVII

by J. Wentworth Day

NOW if you should be at Ludham Bridge, stay longer than I stayed, and walk to Ludham Old Hall, which was once the country seat of the Bishops of Norwich. Before that, it was a residence of the mighty Abbots of St. Benet's Abbey. Most of the original Hall was burned in 1611, but the old brick chapel, built by Bishop Harsnet when the original Hall came to the Bishops of Norwich, still stands. It is used as a barn. The Hall Farm, with its few remains of those more spacious days, can be reached if you walk along the marsh wall, or causeway, which leads from the old Abbey gateway to a road which runs up to the farm.

A furious squall of rain and wind swept the dusky skies and lashed the river as we passed in the distance the few gaunt old ghostly ruins of St. Benet's Abbey, that once-mighty island palace of the priors, who were virtual princes of Eastern Norfolk. It was too wet and windy to go ashore, but I promised myself a slow walk and a careful search among the ruins and the rough fields which surround it on my return.

We turned right, where the Old River makes a loop round Ward Marsh, and, in about a mile, through dark, whispering reed-beds, came to a broad dyke running into the brown, mysterious fens on the left bank. On these fens, the Ranworth Marshes, dwell probably more wild duck of various species than on any comparable area on all Broadland. The fens are strictly preserved, for all this bank of the river for the next seven miles or so bounds the Woodbastwick Hall and Ranworth estate, a property of about seven thousand acres, owned by Colonel Henry Cator, of Woodbastwick. He is a splendid agricultural landlord and a lover and preserver of all rare birds.

Tempesty Old Night

At the end of Ranworth Dyke the boat broke, in a fresh squall of wind and rain, upon the steely, wind-whipped Broad of Malthouse, the eastern or younger brother of Ranworth Great Broad. And there, on that "tempesty old night," we anchored. In half-an-hour that gusty wind blew the rain out of the sky and dropped. A pink-and-saffron dusk closed down on the Broad, which lay still as glass. Brown reed-beds on the far shores glowed in a last flush of gold.

And out of sky, winnowing on black wings, came pouring a great concourse, a shouting multitude, of rooks. They settled down in a mighty clamour of cawings in a marsh wood of oaks and birches which stood, its feet in the reed-beds, between Malthouse and the Great Broad .It was a "winter roost" of the rooks. For, in winter, rooks forsake the nesting rookeries of spring and summer and unite, three or four rookeries together sometimes, in these great winter roosts, which spatter the woods with a whitewash of droppings and fill the skies of morn and evening with clamour.

The boat lay, glimmering white in the dusk, in a quiet dyke which cuts into the green village staithe. The sharp-pitched, thatched roof of a great flint malthouse loomed against the stars at the dyke end. Lights glimmered from the windows of that immaculate and cleanly inn, The Malsters, kept by that gentle and scholarly Broadsman, Jimmy Starling. Tall woods of oak and elm and ghostly birches stood down to the water's edge. Their great branches made a tunnel of mysterious gloom, through which, by the marsh side, ran the low road to other maltings and the Old Hall where once dwelt the Kerrisons, long lords of this manor of Ranworth.

Evening Brew-Up

We made tea in the snug, warm saloon, the last sleepy rook cawing his evensong to the stars, while a family of tawny owls, father, mother, and at least three young birds, hissed, squealed, screeched, and swore from a trinity of great ivy-clad elms overshadowing the dyke. Ours was the only boat on all that dusky broad, alone among the trees and the reeds, and the quiet lip of moving waters. A cold night shut down. It promised snow. Had not the whole boat sweated inwardly but twenty-four hours before, when moisture ran in streams down the cabin walls? That, of a surety, meant snow.

I fell asleep that night in the peace of empty waters, with only the hoarse quack of mallard, the screech of "howlets in the hulver" (owls in the ivy), and the high, windy whisper of wings to lighten the darkness. And in the night, softly like goose feathers, the snow fell.

Soft quacking of wild duck and pattering of seagulls on the cabin roof woke us next morning. A morning of cold north-west wind veering north, with a rampart of black clouds looming over the far reed-beds. More snow on the way. A pair of half-wild duck waddled on the grass within a dozen feet of the cabin windows. Moorhen ran about on the staithe like chickens, picking their breakfast. A cloud of white gulls hovered over the broad. A great *hooroosh* of starlings rose from the reed-beds and went streaming off to upland farms, to feed among cattle in steaming stockyards and dog the ploughshare. And the rooks rose up from their night roost among the oaks and elders and whirled in a frenzy of wings, dipping and sailing, tumbling and stalling against the apple-green and gold of the dawn sky. A white swan slept against the farthest line of reed-beds, an ice-cold figure in an icy scene.

A Splendid Collection

After breakfast I went ashore to talk with Jimmy Starling, to view that magnificent display of moths and butterflies which his uncle collected many years ago in long, patient nights when he haunted the surrounding fens with his white sheets, his glowing lamps, his "sugared" posts and nets. It is a splendid collection, containing many of the rarest butterflies and moths on the British list, and the old man spent hours of patient labour pinning the hundred thus collected on to a great board, in the shape of an eight-pointed star. Unfortunately he incorporated in his intricate pattern many foreign specimens, which is, to say the least, a little baffling to the amateur entomologist.

"We don't want any National Park for the Broads," said Jimmy Starling. "It only means more interference from the Government. The Broads *are* a National Park, for all practical purposes, and they have been for the last fifty years or more. Visitors are well looked after, and more come every year, so how can Whitehall improve on that."

"Well, it will mean more soft jobs for failed politicians," said I. "And you'll have the pleasure of having your own local affairs controlled for you by officials who know nothing about them!"

"Yes. Chaps that'll come down here on a joyride two or three times a year when the weather's fine, have a look round the Broads in a motor-boat, and then go away and sit for the rest of the year in a centrally-heated office in London or Norwich and tell us where we're wrong," said a farmer who had dropped in for his morning pint. "I don't hold with any of it. We get all the visitors we want in summer here. The Boat Builders' Association looks after 'em first-rate, and us farmers fix 'em up with what eggs and milk we can spare — so what more can anyone expect. What's it going to cost anyway?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds a year, to begin with, is their estimate," said I. "But it'll be five million a year before they've been going very long. And there'll be a pension list for them, of course! Wouldn't you like to contribute to that out of some new taxes?" The farmer's reply was brief, pointed, and unprintable.

"They've mucked up farming with their War Agricultural Committees, wasted millions on 'experts' and 'scientists' who can't even plough a furrow or milk a cow, but tell us how to do our jobs," he went on. "What's the result? Fewer lifestock, dear pig-food, no cattle-cake, less eggs, and now the land is tired out because they've flogged it with artificials and put no good farmyard muck into it—we can't make the muck because we haven't got the food to feed the bullocks. So the chaps in the towns will get less corn off the land and less bread in their mouths next year. I'd like to have the Minister and some of his blessed experts out singling beet on my top fields on a

(Continued on the following page)

Gun Gossip

by North Country

IF you wish to use your gun for sitting shots (and at this time of year you may wish to do so in order to get some shooting) I think the sitting pigeon is one of the best marks you can tackle. It is better than a rabbit, and it is not so easy as it might seem to be.

As pigeon have in the national interest to be shot anyhow, no one need think it unsporting to shoot a bird either on the ground or in a tree. And unless this shot is practised many a bird will live to do more damage. It really is necessary to be able to make sure of pigeon as sitting marks, yet funnily enough, I have seen more missing of sitting pigeon (and I have done my share too) than ever should be. I feel sure that this is one of the leading reasons why pigeon have gained the reputation of being "tough."

I may say here in parenthesis that in closed country I am not keen on shooting pigeon with a .22 in bushes and low trees. Where other people may be about, especially workers in the fields, who can say where the bullet will go or what it will do! But a gun is so different and so much safer. So long as you know what is within the next 200 yards or so you need scarcely worry. I can never imagine a weapon better suited to our domestic requirements than the good old "scatter-gun." It is indeed the most universally-approved weapon which ever left our factories. I fancy it will never change other than in small respects and, of course, in cartridges. Like the horse and the clock, it will always be with us, which, as one of our old friends, is a pleasant reflection.

The idea that you can hardly ever kill a pigeon facing you at 30 yards or more need not be given serious attention. Of course you can—if you hold straight. It is no doubt true that pellets from time to time do ricochet from pigeon, or any other bird. But the mere suggestion that a No. 6 pellet hitting a pigeon fair and square in the breast will not penetrate is absurd. I am repeating this, because the other day I heard a man asserting in no uncertain manner that ordinary game shot (such as 5, 6 or 7) would not penetrate sufficiently at this range to make a vital hit.

As a matter of fact, for aiming purposes, I rather like the frontal shot. But too often in this position the bird spots you raising your gun. And as you know, in among trees it is most difficult to get a flying shot. A pigeon which has seen you and which then flies off, seldom presents a shootable target. It is different when a bird has only heard you and is not quite sure of your position—which may happen when you are walking round. The bird will take evasive action all right, but by that time it may be too late.

If you study your bit of shooting you should know the trees where you may expect pigeon. This time of year, when the leaf is fully out, it should not be difficult to keep sufficiently out of sight. Though, of course, you would prefer to shoot your birds on the wing (who wouldn't), you are unlikely to get many chances to do so. This leafy time of the year is all against it. But so long as you can pick out your bird which has settled, you will be sure of some shooting. It is a controversial subject, but I always under such conditions make good use of the little sight at the muzzle end of the barrels. I find that if I get this centred on my mark (with either barrel) I am sure of a kill. Ranges, of course, must be studied, and I am not keen on any sitting shot at more than 45 yards away (no matter how heavily choked a gun may be).

I have seen good clean shooting and consistent killing up to 45 yards. But after that range I am not so sure. Given a full choke and the best-loaded cartridges, I do not think you often kill sitting birds at more than 45 yards. You will sometimes kill one at greater ranges, but this will be exceptional. I like to see my bird drop very dead — no argument about it! A full-choke will do this at 45 yards. A sitting pigeon can be a nice mark, but it can be shot facing you as well as sideways. The real essential is that you take an accurate aim—almost as you would with a .22.

☆

A Shooting Paradise

(Continued from previous page)

morning like this. Then they'd begin to learn something about farming.

"These 'experts' have been the curse of our job, and, you mark my words, if they turn the Broads into a National Park we'll have another gang of 'experts' making a mess of them. I live under a darn good squire, Colonel Cator, and as long as I pay my rent and leave his pheasants alone, he'll never turn me out, and he'll give me all the help I want in bad times. What's to beat that?"

I walked up the road to see young Jermy, who farms the Leist Farm. He was in the great barn, half-smothered in bean dust, surrounded by game-cocks and game-chickens.

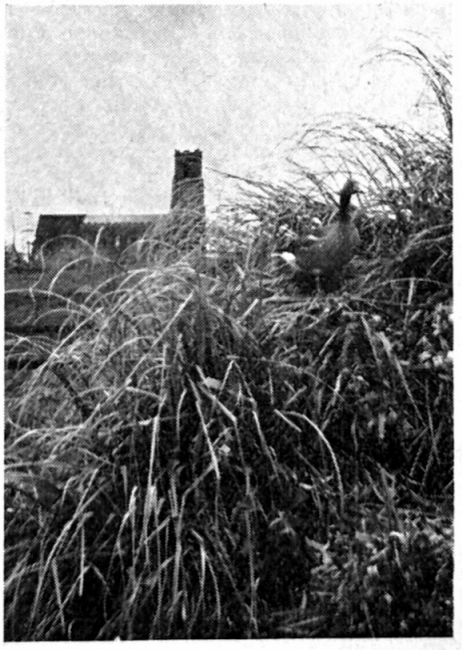
"Lovely lot, aren't they?" said that merry young farmer, whose forebears have been farming Norfolk land for six hundred years. There were Jermys as Mayors of Lynn and other Norfolk towns when Elizabeth I. was on the throne. "I gave three guineas for that game-cock and two guineas apiece for half-a-dozen hens a few years ago, and now I've got a lovely lot. Look at 'em! There's five pounds of meat on that smallest hen, and to look at her you wouldn't think she weighs more than a pound and half. They're all meat, and the cocks are all spirit. They boss even the old cock turkeys about.

"National Park? We don't want it. We're happy enough on this estate, and I know, for one, that I don't want a better man than Colonel Cator for my landlord. People that live on the Broads are the ones to run the Broads. That's all there is about it."

And that, in a nutshell, sums up the attitude of more than 95% of all with whom I have discussed this question of the proposed National Park for the Broads. They do not want it, and they say, with truth, that the Broads are to all intents and purposes a National Park already. The proposals would merely mean a great burden of bureaucracy, imposed from London, on farmers, fishermen, boatbuilders, hotelkeepers, landowners, and all else who earn their living on or by the Broads.

Back at the boat, I found Dick Browne, the headkeeper on the Woodbastwick estate, waiting for me. A quiet, gentle man, with shrewd eyes and a great love of wild life, he is a true son of woods and marshes.

"I thought you'd like to come up to mine and see some of Mr. Low's wonderful photographs of our duck, and have a look at the duck themselves from the observation tower on the edge of the broad," he said.



Ranworth church from the grounds of Ranworth Old Hall.

As we walked up the road, through a woody marsh where mallard sprang in green-headed glory from little pools by the old maltings on the low road—maltings which once sent their wherry loads of malt to Guiness's Brewery in Dublin—Browne told me that an average of from four to five bittern's nests are hatched on the Ranworth Marshes each year.

He put forth the theory of the late Jim Vincent of Hickling that bitterns do not pair, but that the cock bird visits two or three or more hens, and is, in fact, polygamous. I have not heard this theory elsewhere, but Vincent is supposed to have verified it by actually watching the cock birds.

In addition, about two pairs of garganey nest each year, and gadwall are occasionally seen, as are ruffs and reeves, but it is doubtful if either of the two latter species breed locally.

Many duck frequent the Great Broad. Some use Cockshoot Broad, which is fairly shallow, but few are seen on Decoy Broad, which is deep. The average depth of Ranworth Great Broad is four to five feet. The Broad is surrounded by reed-beds and trees, and, even if thrown open to the public, would not make a particularly good sailing-ground. Colonel Cator allows fishermen to fish there, except during the duck-shooting season.

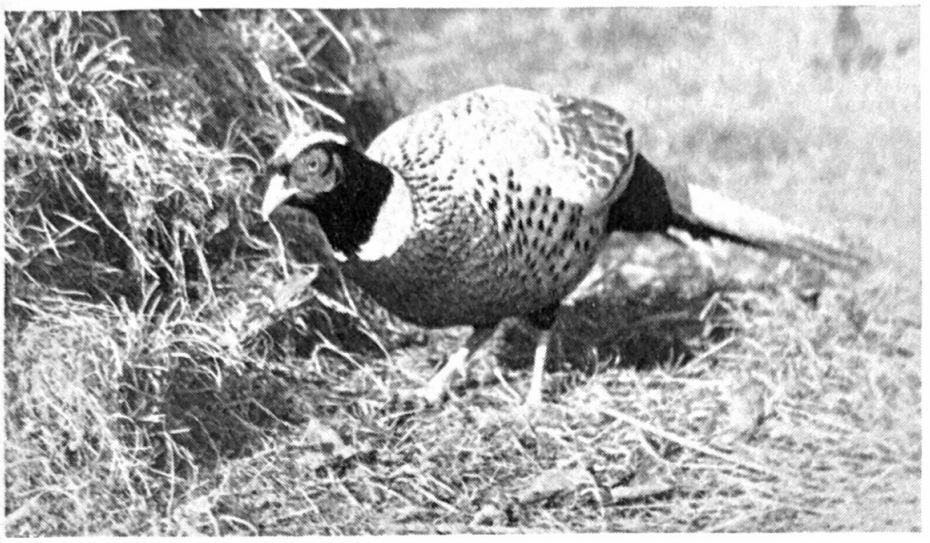
(To be continued next week)

Myxomatosis, Britain's first outbreak of which was exclusively reported in the *Southern Weekly News* in November, 1953, at Edenbridge, near the Sussex-Kent border, and which it was expected would practically wipe out the rabbit population, has not rid the farmer of the pest. There are very definite signs that the rabbit is returning as a pest, West Sussex County Executive of the N.F.U. were told. "One farm in this district is overrun with them, and I have killed five this week," said Mr. D. H. Ford.

Many farmers believe that the rabbits will once again be reduced in numbers by another outbreak of myxomatosis this summer. "When the warm weather arrives myxomatosis will come back again and will keep rabbits down for two or three years," said Mr. H. P. Renwick.

Mr. H. Webley said farmers should not ask for too much outside assistance in clearing the rabbit pest. "Nobody wants too many controls," he said. "We should see what we can do ourselves."

Early in March this year an intensive drive was made to rid Sussex of the survivors of the myxomatosis scourge. Mr. Aubrey Charman, a Southwater farmer, said he would be prepared to pay £2 for every dead rabbit brought to him.—*Southern Weekly News.*



Pheasants, after feeding round ricks where poison has been laid by inexperienced men for small vermin, have not infrequently been found dead.

Narcotics and Wild Birds

by Woodman

If you have a desire to take House-doves, Stockdoves, Rooks, Coughs, or any other-like Birds, then take Wheat, Barley, Fetches, Tares or other Grain, and boil them very well with good store of Nux Vomica in ordinary running water: when they are almost boiled, dry and ready to burst, take them off the fire, and set them by till they be thoroughly cold. Having so done, scatter this Grain in the Haunts of those Birds you have a mind to take; and as soon as they have tasted thereof, they will fall down into a dead swound, and shall not be able to recover themselves in a good while. — The Gentleman's Recreation, Nicholas Cox, 1697.

IF experiments now being carried out at the Ministry of Agriculture's laboratory in Surrey are successful, the use of narcotics for the destruction of pigeon may become as vexed a problem as has the deliberate spreading myxomatosis for the elimination of rabbits. It may prove useful therefore to briefly survey the law as it stands today on the matter.

The Protection of Birds Act 1954 enacts by sec: 5 that the use of any poisoned or stupefying bait for the purpose of killing or taking *any* wild bird (which term for the purposes of sec: 5 includes any bird of game), is an offence for which the "special penalty" can be awarded. In other words, it is a contravention of the Act, which the law must regard as somewhat serious.

However, as usual, there is an exception to the rule. It is a defence for an accused person to show that he used the narcotic bait pursuant to a licence so to do granted by the appropriate authority, as set out in sec: 10 of the Act.

Application For A Licence

In the case of protecting crops or agricultural produce from the depredations of pigeon and certain other birds, sec: 10. (1). (d) enables a person to apply to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (in Scotland the Secretary of State) for such a licence. This licence can have conditions attached, and by these the licensee must strictly abide. [sec: 10. (3).]. It can be granted only in the case of any bird mentioned in Sched: 2 of the Act, and therefore can include such birds as jays, magpies and carrion crows, as well as woodpigeon. It cannot be granted for any bird not included in Sched: 2 and thus cannot possibly be used in the case of game birds or wildfowl. It would seem that the Minister can stipulate any conditions whatsoever in the licence. To lay poison to kill game is, of course, also an offence under sec: 3 of the Game Act, 1831. The penalty is a fine not exceeding £10.

The licence to use such bait must be first obtained; it is no defence to apply for the licence after the deed is done, or pending the grant of a licence.

There is, too, a proviso in sec: 5 to the effect that it shall also be a defence to a charge of placing poisoned bait etc. (even if no licence has been obtained), if the accused can show that such bait was not intended for wild birds, but for killing *animals* in order to protect health, agriculture, or to preserve other *creatures, AND* that all reasonable precautions were used to see that wild birds should not be injured thereby.

One Difficulty

It is difficult to imagine in practice circumstances where a farmer, using drugged bait against woodpigeon, could so place it that other wild birds would not also have access to it. In any case, if the bait is to be used for any wild bird the defence afforded by the proviso is not available. Such a person is therefore driven back on the plea that he had first obtained a licence pursuant to sec: 10, and can show that he has scrupulously observed the conditions and stipulations therein.

The gamekeeper in this respect is in no better position. Poisoned bait for the destruction of four-footed vermin, such as rats, can often, no doubt, be placed where wild birds cannot reasonably be expected to have access to it. In such cases the proviso is available as a defence to a charge under sec: 5. But bait so placed would be of little effect against magpies, jays, carrion crows, etc. Again, if the bait is intended for wild birds of any kind a licence is essential. Therefore, it will be as well if gamekeepers or their employers equip themselves with the necessary permits *before* poison is used against winged vermin.

If a farmer considers that a landlord or a shooting tenant has so far overstocked his land with game birds so as to cause serious damage to crops, he may have a remedy at common law. He now also has one under the Agriculture Act, 1947. By sec: 98 of this Act the Minister through the Agricultural Executive Committee, may serve on any person having the right so to do, a notice to destroy game, either in or out of season. Such order must be complied with, or the Minister can take the necessary steps himself. Game so killed may be sold without a dealer's licence, if the order includes such a direction for disposal.

A licence to kill game is not necessary for such purpose, but a gun licence (10s.), if a gun be used, is required. (sec: 100). This Act does not permit the use of poison at all, and only poison gas against animals alone—not birds. Therefore, the use of poison or drugs cannot be sanctioned against pigeon, game or wildfowl under The Agriculture Act 1947, neither in respect of the two latter under the Protection of Birds Act 1954.

As To The Poacher

As to the poacher who uses stupefying bait to aid him in his nefarious trade, it is clear that he is protecting nothing, and that he has no licence under sec: 10 of the Protection of Birds Act for carrying on such malpractices. When caught at such tricks he should not be proceeded against merely under the Game Laws, with their comparatively inadequate penalties, but under sec: 5 of the Protection of Birds Act. For a first offence he is then liable to a maximum penalty of £25, or one month; for a subsequent transgression three months, or to both such fine and such imprisonment. Worse still, from his point of view, there is a proviso that where the offence has been committed in respect of more than one bird the maximum fine shall be determined as if the offence was in respect of each separate bird. In such circumstances the business of poaching, which ethically is on the same plane as stealing, need no longer remain a paying proposition.

But what of the farmer or his labourer who having properly obtained a licence to use narcotics against pigeon, yields to temptation, and as well as pigeon also picks up a few pheasants which have partaken of the spread? Happily such cases will most likely be rare. Nevertheless, from time to time, there will be the exception, and the dishonest and weak-willed man will be unable to resist the opportunity. This is the real danger, not only to the sportsman and game preserver, but also to the landlord, who needing to augment a meagre income from indifferent farming land, has to let his sporting rights for the best rent he can obtain. Such rights over well stocked and keepered estates can today command a very useful rent.

Game can be as much a crop, and a paying crop without subsidy from taxes too, as any other. The shooting lessee is just as much a tenant as the farmer; he pays his rent and is entitled to have his interests adequately safeguarded. On the other hand, the farmer's fight against the pigeon menace is a fight against fearful odds. It would be unfair to preclude him from using what means are made available to him.

The solution to holding the balance as equitably as may be between the farmer and the sportsman may lie in the framing of the conditions and stipulations which the Minister of Agriculture has power to insert in any licence granted under sec: 10 of the Protection of Birds Act.

A safeguard is already provided in sub: sec: 4 of sec: 10, wherein it is laid down that the Minister in granting licences shall consult the Advisory Committee on Birds, who would be in a position to recommend what restrictions and conditions (if any) they would deem it advisable to insert in any licence. Of course,

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Bird Life on a Sewage Farm

by C. W. G. Paulson

FOUR snipe flush from the waterlogged field and circle round in purposeful flight. Two birds alight again; the others pass out of sight behind the trees, making for the river meadows beyond. The glasses reveal the hunched-up bodies of nearly forty snipe where the two have just landed. The natural camouflage of the birds' brown-streaked plumage gives such perfect protection that where they are not constantly disturbed they take little trouble for their safety beyond crouching still and round, unless one approaches closely.

As we walk closer the snipe become restive, and another wisp suddenly rises up; others follow until all but an odd bird are in the air together. They form into a loose flock and fly round over the field with a few stragglers trailing behind. Several times they circle overhead, the flock getting smaller as birds peel off and pass out of sight across the river. However, if we retire for a few yards into a background screen of elms the rest will drop in again to rest and feed.

Every year in March such a gathering as this is a familiar sight at any of the few remaining old-fashioned sewage farms near London—farms where the waste water is pumped out into banked up fields which are alternately flooded and then allowed to dry out, thereby exposing a rich feeding ground.

Now, however, progress demands the modern system of sprinklers which discharges the effluence over clinker-beds which are frequented by pied wagtails, black-headed gulls, and countless starlings.

Fortunate indeed is the watcher who has one of the old-fashioned farms near enough to his home to make regular visits possible, for a wealth of bird life can be seen throughout the seasons. If the farm is sufficiently large and lies in the path of one of the migration routes there is always the possibility of an exciting visitor.

Seasons of the Year

Turning the pages of one's notebooks it is easy to relive the visits made during the year. January, the month of frosts, when each visit starts with a quick walk round the flooded settling tanks, because experience has shown that at this season of the year, when the tanks are nearly always full, the snipe are driven to a flooded field just outside the boundaries of the farm. On such a site accurate counting is impossible. At first approach, many birds flush and then as we squelch out into the centre of the field others spring up, but by the time we reach the opposite edge of the field, birds are already dropping in again. A spring of teal leaves an open patch of water and even when we have left this part of the marsh far behind we can still hear their musical call as they fly round and round.

So far as the small birds are concerned, the waste dumps near the edge of the farm are the most fruitful watching ground. Small parties of titmice, blue and great, mingle with the chaffinches and meadow-pipits searching amongst the refuse, and we examine carefully a mixed flock of goldfinches and greenfinches twittering in a patch of alders to make sure we are not overlooking any siskins.

A change takes place in February and towards the end of the month the duck begin to pass through, signalling the first real sign of the spring migration. Teal, mallard and shoveler are regular visitors. The first redshank also arrive and on every visit we flush a single green sandpiper.

As March passes, the snipe gatherings are breaking up and the redshank have reached the maximum number as the last birds return from the coastal flats to use the farm as a feeding ground and courtship area. Lapwings are their constant companions and the air is full of their music as the birds wheel and tumble in display flight above the farm.

View showing the edge of the sewage farm.

From Spring Onwards

As spring bursts on us in April the quick walks of winter are forgotten. At this season one's visits seem all too infrequent. Birds, which later on will be passed over with only a quick recording glance, receive close scrutiny. Every corner of the farm needs careful exploration. Sitting watching the season's first yellow wagtail—a cock bird in glorious plumage—or standing by a reed-choked ditch waiting for the first glimpse of a sedge-warbler singing amongst the tangled vegetation, the daylight hours seem all too short, but at the end of each visit the tally list shows a growing total of species for the year.

Soon the season's first swallow or warbler is forgotten, because one morning as we cross the bank dividing the two main settling tanks a small wader flushes from a drying patch of mud in the lower tank. The distinctive call *teeu! teeu!* and the absence of any white wing-bar in flight identifies the bird as a little ringed plover. Soon the male's trilling courtship note will be added to the spring music as the bird flies up and down above the drying mud in display flight with long, slow wing beats. Prior to 1938, when the ornithological world was electrified by the news that a pair had nested successfully by the Tring reservoirs in Hertfordshire, the bird was only recorded in the British Isles as a very rare vagrant.

In the *British Birds Magazine* for June 1954, E. R. Parrinder has summarised the status of the little ringed plover as a breeding species in these islands and the story makes interesting reading. By 1950 there were 29 known nesting pairs, 18 of which were distributed round London. Sussex boasted four pairs, while Suffolk, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire shared the remaining seven pairs between them. In 1953 the total number of pairs recorded had risen to 54 with new counties added to the list.

Migration of the Waders

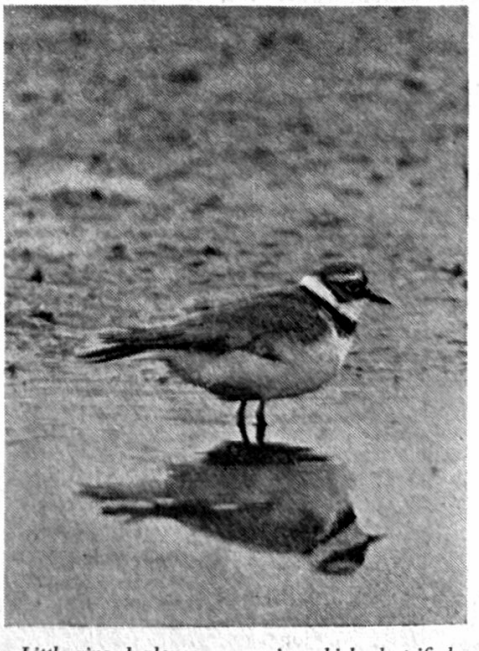
In May we watch for migrant waders; dunlin, ringed plover and common sandpipers are seen regularly. But their visits are only brief; the spring urge is on and the birds pass through quickly on the way to their breeding grounds. The list will lengthen when a sudden deterioration of weather conditions with heavy rain and low cloud occurs. Greenshank, wood-sandpiper, and black-tailed godwit may be seen. Hundreds of martins and swifts will be hawking for flies above the tanks and, before the weather clears to encourage a continuation of the northern passage, common terns are added to the list.

Throughout June our watching is more leisurely and we concentrate on the nesting species. However, our thoughts are already on the autumn passage of waders and by the end of the first week of the following month the common and green sandpipers have arrived—the vanguard of the autumn migration.

The steep banks which divided the settling tanks are lush with vegetation, making it easy to build an inconspicuous hide. Once inside, even on a hot day, the flies and stench from the black mud are soon forgotten for on every occasion there is something of interest to be seen and by watching regularly from such a position one soon amasses an impressive total of wading species. Also there is the opportunity of close observation, for the pace of migration in autumn is more leisurely and birds often stay for days at a time.

Even though we may have worked the whole farm the previous day there is a feeling of expectancy as one crawls up the bank and

(Continued on page 386, col. 2)



Little ringed plover—a species which electrified the ornithological world in 1938.

The pigeon question can be settled only by gun and decoys.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

IN this age of wonders the scientist enjoys a prestige which is apt to dim the halo of the practical man who can often connect cause and effect but who may not be able to elucidate the steps between the one and the other. Nevertheless, the most brilliant scientific syntheses must be based on practical experience, otherwise they tend to become empty theories or plain absurdities that may ultimately do harm to the human race.

During the last few decades we have seen how agriculture has apparently benefited from the tireless energies of scientists. Artificial fertilisers have been skilfully used to replace the mineral wastage inseparable from intensive farming; insect, bacterial, and vegetable pests have had an increasingly difficult struggle for survival among the foodstuffs of man; and more recently we have seen the effects of science on rates and rabbits. The rat destroyer has now a preparation which, I understand, alters the composition of the blood, with fatal results. And myxomatosis saves the rabbiter the trouble of using traps, snares, nets, ferrets, or gun; for a time at least. The next creature on the list for annihilation by scientific means is the woodpigeon. It is promised a dose of some (so far unnamed) narcotic poison.

I have read with great interest some of the reports on this new offensive which the scientists are preparing to launch when all the details are settled; and I confess that this looks to me like one of their rare absurdities. It is so utterly at variance with the practical experience of shooting men, naturalists, and ordinary intelligent countrymen that one wonders how anyone ever conceived such a method of controlling, or attempting to control, our woodpigeon population. For this reputed annihilating agent is not disease, which most living creatures are unable to avoid if they are concentrated thickly enough, but simply another form of poisoning; and this weapon has been used since man began to think constructively, without making any noticeable mark on a species.

A Salutary Warning

It is a fact that the first few casualties of any poisoning offensive act as a salutary warning to the survivors, no matter whether they are struck suddenly dead or whether they linger on in pain for hours or days. And although I have never used a narcotic or stupefying bait against any creature, I am prepared to believe that the effect would be similar. One might even say that pigeon rolling about in a drunken fashion would have a more frightening effect on their alert mates than ones that died swiftly. But apart from this, there are other aspects of a poisoning offensive against pigeon which make the whole operation impracticable; and not the least important is the difficulty of inducing those wily birds to accept the kind of food so craftily offered by their potential destroyers. For they can be capricious, even if they are at times greedy.

Food of the Wood-Pigeon

I cannot name all the foods eaten by pigeon during the course of a year, but they include: several kinds of corn; haws; beechmast; oak apples; acorns; bilberries; ivy berries; laurel berries; clover; young beech leaves; greens of the Brassica family, and a lot of weeds that could only be identified by a skilled botanist. As far as the farmer is concerned, however, pigeon commit their greatest crime when they attack newly-sown and harvested corn, and the brassicas when they are succulent plants. In extreme cases, pigeon can clear a field of young turnips or cabbages unobtrusively in the early mornings, and they can seriously reduce a corn yield. They can also be a big nuisance to covert keepers when they devour Indian corn laid down for pheasants, because keepers are reluctant to shoot the marauders where there is a chance of frightening their own birds. So the thieves flourish; but let it be noted that if the patience of any game preserver does become exhausted, and he shoots at a rising flock of pigeon, that is generally the end of the trouble. For they take heed of danger in a situation of this sort very quickly.

However, if we take the foregoing list of vegetable matter as being representative of the food commonly eaten by pigeon, we can easily guess that only corn could form a suitable vehicle for a narcotic. The other items, such as greenstuff, must be growing, or they are not found in sufficient abundance to make a convenient bait. So our next step is to discover how doped corn could be presented to pigeon without any possibility of its being lifted by other birds. No doubt, the scientist would say that any narcotic used in circumstances of this sort must have only a temporary effect and, therefore, it will not matter in the least whether birds other than pigeon eat it or not; but game preservers could point out that doped bait is much more likely to be taken by hand-reared pheasants than by wild pigeon, and could be used by poachers, if it were available to anyone.

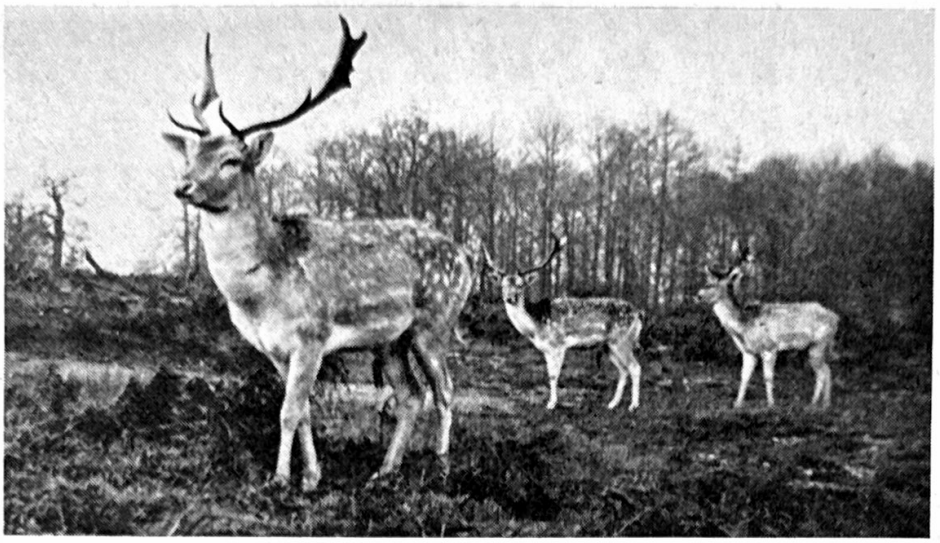
Laying The Bait

But we will assume, for the sake of the argument, that game does not matter so long as the pigeon are destroyed, and that every farmer is obliged to strew several bucketsful (or hundredweights) of doped corn on any field that is being pillaged, excepting fields of harvested or ripe corn, because it is manifestly useless to throw down treated grain where other food can be found in abundance by pigeon. So the bait must be laid on newly-sown fields, or among green-crops while the ground is comparatively bare; and we must note before we go further that uneaten grain in a green-crop field is likely to germinate, which might be a nuisance. In fact, we can safely say that doped corn would have its maximum usefulness only on cornfields soon after they are sown, and this "maximum" will be a long way short of annihilation, even if it were practised by every farmer in the British Isles at the same time; for there are several limiting factors in addition to the wariness natural to all threatened creatures.

First, any pigeon stupefied temporarily would have to be collected and killed before they recovered sufficiently to fly away, which means that someone would have to watch the baited area perhaps for hours. Secondly, some pigeon would inevitably arrive at the baited area with half-filled crops; so they might get only a small dose of narcotic, and eventually become stupid miles from the danger zone, in which case, they would recover. Furthermore, they would never look again at doped bait as long as they lived. Thirdly, pigeon are unpredictable birds. They might not go near a field where bait had been laid for them, if they found something better to attract their attention. Therefore, as much corn might ultimately be wasted as the pigeon would have eaten, if they had appeared. Fourthly, it is probable that a narcotic with a temporary effect on a bird would have but a temporary potency in the bait; and if a narcotic were used which affected the victims for several days, the public would cry out at the cruelty of presenting half-paralysed pigeon to all the predators of the countryside. But despite the remarks enumerated in this paragraph, the bag of victims would, in no circumstances, be as big as the optimists imagine. As I have already said, wild creatures soon learn to beware of injurious food, although a small percentage of them do succumb to the wiles of the poisoner.

One must also consider the consequences of letting the public, even a restricted public, have access to a drug which can stupefy pigeon. There are possibilities in this for people with criminal tendencies; for it is hardly likely that farmers would buy the big quantity of bait necessary ready doped. It is, of course, conceivable that only the Pest Departments will operate this scheme. If so, they will have to be considerably enlarged.

In the last few years our legislators have concerned themselves with the destruction of vermin. First of all they got rid of two-thirds of our gamekeepers (who formerly killed the vermin) by taxing the landowners, then they try to remove an unexpected snag by employing officials and offering bounties. But they will discover yet that this pigeon question can only be settled by the man with gun and decoys.



Fallow bucks in a clearing on the edge of the woodlands.

A DOE AT DUSK

by Cervus

I FOUND the slots of the three wild fallow deer one morning towards the latter end of winter crossing the ride and following the old deer track through the scrub timber covert, past the pitiful remains of what had once been a fine buck before its antlers had entangled with the diabolical deer snare. This had been set by an old poacher, and overlooked by the negligent keeper who had the beat before me.

The tracks led up to the lump of rock-salt, much loved by all hoofed animals, and which I had placed for the benefit of the few deer in the locality, for deer have always provided an immense source of fascination for me. My first contact was with the shy little roe deer of the big Dorset woodlands, the old Royal Deer Forest of Cranbourne Chase, and the larger variety, originally fallow with a strong infusion of Japanese blood, brought about through Japanese leaving the main Brownsea Island herd and swimming Poole Harbour to the mainland. Later, in the north, I had an opportunity of studying the tall red deer of the open hillsides and had my first introduction to deer stalking proper. So naturally I was pleased to find there were deer in my new place in the south of Lincolnshire. Wild bred these, though the original stock were escaped beasts from Grimsthorpe and Burghley Park, the seats of the Lords of Ancaster and Exeter respectively. These deer are, of course, persecuted by everyone and probably understood by few and hated by forester and agriculturalist. How much we could learn from the continentals in respect to our indigenous deer, with their great pride in their forests and their very high estimation of the deer as a beast of the chase, against whom the use of a shotgun is prohibited.

Feeding on a Clover Ley

That evening saw me quietly approaching the wood on a moderate cross wind. From a neighbouring covert I spied out the nearside of the wood. No deer were visible, so I filled the magazine of my 7 mm. Mauser stalking rifle, with which I have accounted for a fair number of red stags and hinds. I crossed the intervening combined wheat stubble, the crackling almost deafening to my tautened nerves. Coming alongside the wood I turned right, making for a corner which would give a good view of a large clover ley, bounded on three sides by woodland, and where, I decided, the deer would be taking their evening meal.

A rapid thaw was in progress, so every step I took along the sodden headland resulted in a horrible squelch hardly conducive to successful deer stalking. Turning the corner, I found the ground better. This took me along the bottom of the covert, from whence the drive is started when the wood is beaten out for pheasants.

A Grand Picture

Coming up to the far corner, the wind dead in my face, I carefully drew up behind a stout hawthorn tree. Three hundred yards across the field, against the black background of thorns which formed the covert fence of the oak wood, lying on the far side of the clover, hardly discernible in the now fading light, were three delicate forms, heads down, nibbling daintily. Their nearly black saddles merging completely with the thorns, buff flanks showing up golden in the last light of day, they presented a picture to gladden the heart of any true countryman, sportsman or otherwise. Two young does and a handsome buck.

Slipping from behind the tree I went down in a large patch of slushy snow, through which ran two waterlogged cart tracks. Creeping over this most uncomfortable obstacle, I came to the combined oat stubble of the new clover ley, whereupon three pheasants got up and flew home to roost, the cockbird loudly voicing his displeasure. Three heads were immediately jerked up. I froze, crouching, until the deer resumed feeding, then I crept forward again, as silently as I could through foot-high stubble, my knees and gloves soaked.

More pheasants rose, and again the deers' suspicions were aroused. For the rest of the stalk, pheasants continued to move off the field, the deer taking notice at every bird's departure, but apparently getting used to it. Altogether, I estimate that I moved over seventy head of game, making my progress the most thrilling and difficult stalk I have ever experienced, while the sodden condition of the ground and the care needed among the crackling stubble certainly contributed to make it arduous enough, though comparatively short, compared with the long stalks after red deer.

Once a carrion crow appeared and circled me two or three times. Mobbing me noisily, it appeared to know that I was not armed with my shot gun, but in reality mistaking my creeping form for some predatory beast. The deer on this occasion apparently deemed it beneath their dignity to heed the abuse of so vulgar a type of vermin. At a final flush of pheasants, however, the gallant buck actually spotted me, and he advanced a yard or two, intrigued. The range was about one hundred and fifty yards and the light was far from good, but the pencil-slim line of flank, foreleg, and neck still glowed golden.

Stalker's Advice

I carefully drew up into the kneeling position, stripped off my sodden gloves, and gently turned over the safety-catch. Recalling the advice of every Scottish stalker, "Tak ye're wind mon," I waited, relaxed, letting the rifle dangle from both hands in front of my knee. The deer relaxed somewhat, the buck turning broadside and eclipsing one of the does, so that a correctly placed shot would have grassed them both.

However, I was not out for mass destruction. Besides, according to the old statute board from Cranbourne Chase, to be seen in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Farnham, Dorset, the killing of a buck at this time of the year was taboo. On the left stood a doe, broadside, head still erect—fair game. I gently eased the Mauser butt into my shoulder, pressed the inside of my left elbow against the outside of my knee, brought my foresight (looking big and black) to bear on the forend of the doe, took first pressure and squeezed the trigger.

The Mauser exploded with a hollow roar, leaping within my grasp. The soft-nosed, high-velocity bullet, propelled by its nitro cellulose charge, sped true to its mark and struck the deer with a shattering impact, plainly audible. She reared bolt upright, rolled over backwards, stone dead, the spine broken at the base of the neck.

I hurried over to bleed the carcase and remove the gralloch, noticing that her two companions had moved only a few yards and were regarding me with wonder, accustomed as they probably were to being chivvied about in their woodlands by fools with shot guns, and cunning as they become in eluding such people, I think to have one of their number picked off in the open by a suitable weapon, was a novelty indeed, and they allowed me to get within seventy yards of them.

Highly satisfied, I performed the honours, hoisted the doe across my shoulders with some difficulty, and, holding my rifle with more difficulty, bore her home in triumph.

Clay Pigeon Shooting Fixtures

June 18: Wetherby and Dist. G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot.

June 18: The London G.C. London and Middlesex Skeet Championship.

June 18: Billingsley and Chorley G.C. Shropshire Sporting Championship and Open Shoot (50 birds), 1 p.m.

June 18: Blandford and Dist. G.C., West of England Down the Line Championship (100).

June 19: Bisley G.C. Open Shoot.

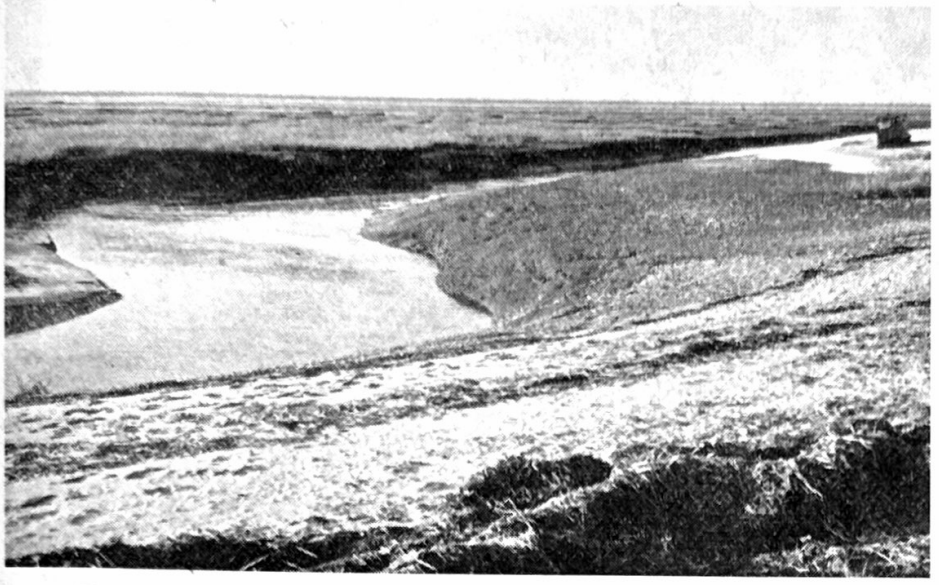
June 22: Bowland and Dist. G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe. Evening practice.

June 22: Birmingham G.C. Members only, practice night.

June 24 and 25: 21st Annual International Tournament, Collinstown, Dublin. Team matches between England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with Australia and New Zealand shooting by post, and British Open Individual Championship. Special Double-Rise event on Sunday, June 26. Under the auspices of the Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. P. McDonnell, 11 Foyle Road, Fairview, Dublin).

July 2: Birmingham G.C. Open Sporting Competitions. Worcestershire Down-the-Line Championship.

We much regret that, in last week's issue, we announced a shoot of the Childrey C.P.S.C. as taking place on June 16. In fact the shoot of the Childrey C.P.S.C. will be held on July 16 and is an Open Sporting Shoot.



The vast saltings of the Wash, where "butts" can be speared in most of the creeks.

The Young Shot

Side Lines

by Petrel

THERE is currently a new game in vogue amongst the part-time countrymen of the Big Village; a variation on the old watch-the-birdie theme. The rules are elastic —too elastic — and the equipment required comprises a piece of paper and pencil. All the player has to do is to think hard and write down the names of birds which he has seen at one time or another, and whether he lists them individually or as a species is left to him. Rather a pointless pastime you may say, and I agree, Its only value seems to be that the compiling of such a list must be an exercise in honesty, and obviously no bird should be included unless the observer is absolutely certain that he has seen it. But here again the danger common to all bird watching and counting raises its ugly, inaccurate head—in his eagerness to see something unusual and increase his score in his little book, the enthusiastic, but inexperienced watcher is very liable to be deceived by his eyes and wishful thinking. On the other hand, of course, if someone reports a rarity from where it has never been seen before, who is to say him nay. Scepticism on the part of experts—especially aged experts—has always been the chief obstacle to the young amateur.

Personally, I am not a great watcher of birds. If I see a bird which I cannot identify, I take pains, by referring to the many excellent books now available, and by discussing it with naturalists, to discover its identity, but I am always prepared to consider the obvious answer before getting over-excited about the possible discovery of the rehabilitation of a dodo. Nor do I go out of my way to trespass on private avian property during the nesting season just for the sake of seeing some bird which I have never seen before if there is any danger—which there usually is—of disturbing more common and more numerous nesters.

In Quantity

While I am interested in any and every bird, I take a particular interest in the quantity of any species—not merely in the case of game or wildfowl where the inference is that the more there are, the more likely is the chance of a reasonable bag — but because increased numbers can usually be related to other interesting factors, such as, for instance, farm cropping, an abundance of *zos* in a particular area, an intensive campaign against vermin, or the right weather at nesting and hatching time. It was, I am certain, pure chance that led me to see five cuckoos in the air at the same time immediately above my cabbage patch, but never having seen so many, so close together, in such a small expanse of sky, I wondered at the time how many cuckoos anyone had ever seen flying together. When, during the following week-end, I counted eleven buzzards soaring and spiralling together over fields where no rabbit has been seen for months and where buzzards have been, until that very day, conspicuous by their absence, I searched for an explanation, but failed to find it. And incidentally, let me add, in passing, that the primroses and bluebells, as seems to be the rule this year, were everywhere in colourful profusion, which emphasises the question of the moment; is the dearth of rabbits responsible ?

What Is The Answer ?

Do rabbits eat primroses ? Or is it a fact that the ground is recovering from the fouling that rabbit droppings and urine may have caused ? We have here an interesting problem. I predict that after harvest we shall be indoctrinated with the theory that this year's better crops are a direct result of the scarcity of rabbits. Let us make quite certain that there is no more simple explanation—the weather, for instance —before we pronounce judgment.

You will not need a detective's licence to guess from the foregoing paragraph that I have lately been visiting the West Country. In fact, I spent Whitsun on the moors.

From a personal viewpoint, the advice "go west young man," in this country, does not appeal to me. In the majority of field sports the west can more than hold its own. The home of stag-hunting, with otter-hunting on its many rivers, and affording friendly, informal and effective fox-hunting, it has much to offer, while its estuaries, streams and reservoirs combine to make it a paradise for game, coarse and sea anglers, but if you are a shooting man, go west and, comparatively speaking, your shooting opportunities have "gone west" literally. I now await the furore of the locals and I shall be delighted if they can prove me wrong. However, on my Whitsun visit I went with no intention of fishing or shooting, but unable to subdue a wildfowler's instinct, I did go down to the tideline and it was here that I realised and practised a side-line which many fowlers might copy, especially during the early part of the season.

Wanting fresh fish for the table, on which quantity was the first consideration, we cast aside all thoughts of purism and high quality sport and resorted to the methods of the true hunter. After a careful study of the tide and bus tables—the latter equally important and apparently less regular in this neck of the woods—we set out for the nearest beach armed with a jar of salted mackerel and a long line.

There can hardly be any fishing tackle so inexpensive and so effective in the right place as a long line. All that is needed is a length of strong blind cord — the length depending entirely on the fisherman's enthusiasm, energy and the nature of the fishing ground. To this at intervals of a yard or so are tied snoods of cuttyhunk or strong nylon about nine inches long, and to the end of the snoods are fastened the hooks. The hook size depends on the fish expected, but as a general rule Numbers 1 and 2 will fill the bill. It is worth using galvanised hooks, on which salt water has no rusting effect. Bait again is dependent on local conditions, but strips of fresh herring or mackerel will meet most cases.

'Ware Gulls

The line is put down at low water as far seawards as possible to ensure that it is fishing for the maximum length of time in the greatest depth of water, and is laid diagonally from shore to tide-line. Needless to say, each end must be securely fastened down, and if the shore end can be made fast to a convenient post or breakwater, so much the better. As the line may not be submerged by the tide for some time, the baited hooks must be covered with sand or mud, or the only things you will catch are gulls, which are quick to spot a piece of fish. Similarly you must be on the spot as soon as the tide recedes, for the same reason. If you are unable to wait until the tide has ebbed sufficiently for you to wade out and retrieve the line and catch, when you set it, attach each end of the main line to its anchor with a length of cord of lesser breaking strain and run an extension of the stronger line up to a vantage point above high water mark. A few hefty tugs will then snap the weaker securing links and you can retrieve the tackle from a distance.

Take the trouble when you get home to soak the line thoroughly in fresh water and it will last without rotting for a long time. The whole outfit wound on a piece of wood or card takes up little room in a game bag, and I, for one, shall certainly carry a long line as a "second string" on fowling forays.

On the Wash we used to relieve fowling inactivity at low water by "butting," or spearing flat fish left behind in the emptying creeks. The weapon here was a wooden garden rake with the prongs replaced by six inch nails, and the method was to start at the seaward end of a creek and wade up it, prodding the muddy bottom ahead with the rake. An impaled fish was signified by a "thrumming" which could be felt along the rake handle and the victim was hand-picked off the nails and popped into a sandbag slung on the shoulder.

An old fowler of those parts told me that his father employed even simpler tactics. He would wade barefoot along the creek and tread hard on any "butt" which he felt wriggling beneath his soles. A dab hand with both feet, so to speak.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

RABBIT IN THE BALANCE

Sir,—I am surprised to see that your correspondent E.R.F. (issue May 27) construes parts of the above article as being "the continued abuse which is poured on the heads of farmers in general. . . ." Did he not notice that I wrote: "Many hard words have been flung at farmers as a class. But this, like most generalisations, was nonsense?" Indeed, I defended the majority of farmers of my acquaintance. I then endeavoured to pinpoint the economic causes behind the spreading of myxomatosis.

The article resulted from observations and discussions with farmers, keepers, trappers, and agricultural labourers in five counties and it dealt mainly with *facts* in an objective review of the position to date as far as was possible in so short a space. The setting down of facts does not constitute abuse; neither does the quoting of the powerful censure by the Dean of Winchester (for this, too, was part of the picture), nor yet the applying of the words of Shakespeare to my own sentiments. I share "Tower-Bird's" dislike of abuse. Strong criticism—yes. Abuse—no.

E.R.F. writes that I made the rabbit imports figures sound "very impressive." But they are of themselves impressive. And taken in conjunction with a reasonable estimate of rabbit damage and the known value of the rabbit, they are all the more impressive. Coals to Newcastle! He also writes that "importing would persist no matter how plentiful rabbits were in this country," thereby showing that he missed my point. Imports of rabbits rose to a peak in 1951—two years before we had myxomatosis. In that year the known value of the rabbit turnover in this country, inclusive of imports and the gun and cartridge trade's business, could not have been less than £22 million. I am more impressed by this figure than by any airy-fairy estimate of rabbit damage.

Even if the spreading of the disease in some places could have been economically justified, it could never have been morally justified inasmuch as it was bound to affect the *property* and finances of those who most emphatically did not want it.

One keeper tells me that the disease has reduced his work enormously, but he would rather have the work—and the rabbits. A correspondent from Scotland writes that whereas last year he dispatched 119,377 couple of rabbits, he now has 50 trappers out of work. This he regards as "just a drop in the ocean" of the total loss. Yet another says of rabbits: "If there is ever another war we shall miss them."

In common with many trappers and keepers, I still believe that the fall in the prices obtained for rabbits and the narrowing margin of profit on rabbit clearance were the main causes for the sly spreading of the disease. And sly seems to be *le mot juste*. For no one has yet shouted in my hearing: "Behold, I have spread myxomatosis and am proud."

Now, I have re-read the above article and I would not change one word of it. It was an honest attempt to hold up a mirror, as it were, to the scene. Ought I to have remembered that few mirrors flatter; and that the greater the accuracy, the greater the risk of causing offence?

I enclose the letter from the correspondent in Scotland for your interest, but not for publication, as I do not think this was intended by the writer.

JOHN BREWER,
Hunts.

Mr. Jack Hargreaves presents the Championship Cup to Mr. J. Wheater at the 52nd Annual English Open Down-the-Line Championship Meeting at Down Barns Farm, Northolt, Middlesex. (For results of the Championship, see page 384.)

HISTORY OF GROUSE SHOOTING

Sir,—Like the Hon. Secretary to the Merseyside Naturalists' Association, on reading Mr. Henry Fletcher's interesting article on the History of Grouse Shooting, my attention was drawn to the statement that, "up to about the year 1850 . . . no close season had ever been fixed when it would have been illegal to shoot them."

This hardly accords with the law, as far as I have been able to ascertain it. In England, a close season for grouse (red game) was decreed between December 1 and July 25 by the statute 2 Geo. III, C.19, 1761. These dates were altered in 1773 by 13 Geo. III, C.55, to December 10—August 12. There the matter remained till the Great Game Act of 1831 which re-enacted this latter period.

As regards that part of the U.K. called Scotland, the Act 13, Geo. III, C.54, of 1773 fixed the close season for grouse as from December 10—August 12 and so it remains to this day.

The Scottish Parliament had in 1427 enacted that no partridges, plovers, blackcock, greyhen, moorcock, and "sik fowles" were to be taken between Lent and August. In 1707 the close season for all moor fowls was made from March 1 to August 20.

Of course, whether these seasons were strictly adhered to by sportsmen and others I really cannot say, but at law close seasons are obviously of long standing.

WOODMAN,
Surrey.

HOW TO REMAIN A LIVE FOWLER

Sir,—I note that you query my recommendations on the above subject, citing an instance of a man who might "slip up and break a leg while crossing a creek as the tide is making," when my suggestions would prove of little avail. This is, of course, true, but please note the incredible combination of unfortunate circumstances! Your hypothetical victim must (1) slip up, (2) break his leg, (3) while crossing a creek, (4) while the tide is running, and (5) (presumably) when beyond sight or sound of assistance!

Is it seriously suggested that all fowlers should carry a collection of fireworks in case they should find themselves in such a predicament? I would suggest that a tin-hat was added to the safety equipment lest some careless aviator should drop a spanner on the victim's head before his S.O.S. signals have been answered!

People *have* been known to fall off cross-channel boats, and others have broken legs by slipping on banana skins. In view of this, should all cross-channel passengers wear life-jackets, and all pedestrians push a broom along in front of them?

I do not think I am unduly reckless, but I shall continue to pin my faith in a watch and a compass, and hope to "Remain a Live Fowler"!

BILL POWELL,
Glencaple, Dumfries.

[It is all very well to sermonise from one comparatively small area of fowling ground which you know intimately, but many fowlers go farther afield from their homes, and certainly often enough find profitable shooting spots beyond sight or sound of assistance.—Ed.]

CASUALTY OF MYXOMATOSIS

Sir,—I thought that the enclosed cutting might be of interest to you and readers.

I have been a "lifetime" reader of *The Shooting Times*.

T. MINEY,
Norwich.

[Thank you for the cutting, but since you omit to say from which paper it was culled, we are unable to give due acknowledgment.—Ed.]

Last week marked the closing down of a Norwich firm whose records go back over the past 150 years. It is Messrs. Claxton & Warren, of St. George's, the hatters' furriers, who have found that the dying out of the rabbit population through myxomatosis in this area has deprived them of their livelihood. A

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colleague who called at the premises in St. George's Plain found that only a skeleton staff remained. The workrooms, where at one time as many as 100 people worked treating the skins, are silent and empty. Gradually over the past year the staff have been paid off as the supplies of skins grew smaller. This firm was known as Claxton, Warren & Nixon Ltd., between 1925-53, but after the retirement of Mr. M. G. Warren in 1953 the managing directorship passed into the hands of Mr. D. P. Lingwood, of the Brandon firm of S. & P. Lingwood. This firm is still continuing by buying skins on the skin market from Australia and New Zealand—but the Norwich firm is closing down.

In busy times Messrs. Claxton & Warren dealt with as many as 12,000 skins each week. Many of these were sent to Stockport, where they would be used for making men's hats—including many an Ascot grey "topper"—and women's shapes. Removing the top hairs from the fur with a sharp knife to reveal the soft, grey down was a job that required a steady hand and great thoroughness. Many women were employed for this work—until machines did the job. Before 1953 Australian - skinned rabbits were treated in Norwich, although Scottish rabbits have always been best because of their thicker fur. This ancient firm was described affectionately by an employee who had worked there all his life as a "family concern." It was one in which fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers had all worked together. Names such as Metcalfe, Larnder and Kadge were as familiar in this firm as household words.

CANADA GEESE

Sir,—I send you a photograph of Canada geese with their brood of two. The gander, with outstretched neck, is about to turn the one gosling into line; he must follow the course of his mother and sister.

A. Kay,
Birmingham.

Sir,—In his article, entitled as above (issue April 22), Mr. J. C. M. Nichols makes a statement which is liable to convey a false impression regarding the size of geese which are found on the prairies of Southern Saskatchewan. He states: "... but the geese which frequent the prairie lakes of S. Saskatchewan are doubtless of one of the medium-sized varieties. In his twenty years of experience of farming and sport in the neighbourhood of Battleford, N.W.T., my brother Charles never shot a goose that weighed more than 7 or 8lb. i.e. the weight of a really good grey goose and no more."

Now, although I have not yet had the good fortune, in all my years of wildfowling, to shoot a goose, I have been in the company of those who had better luck, and if memory serves, all the geese shot by my companions tipped the scales in excess of the weights given by Mr. Nichols. However, not wishing to rely on memory in this connection, I had a chat with Mr. Brad Thompson (one of our local wildfowlers of long experience who has shot numerous geese), and he assured me that he has shot geese weighing more than 13lb., and these, of course, would be the greater Canadas.

Mr. Thompson went on to say that, during recent years, he has not shot a goose weighing more than about 8lb. and his bags of the big geese were made at Lake Johnstone, some 50 miles or so south-west of Moose Jaw (where he ranched) many years ago. As Mr. Nichols refers to Battleford as being in the "North-West Territory"; he, too, is undoubtedly speaking of many years ago.

Just to get an "official" ruling on the matter, I wrote to Mr. E. L. Paynter, Game Commissioner for Saskatchewan, and I quote from Mr. Paynter's letter of May 17: "... In some experimental work that was performed, of 68 females the average was 7lb. 14oz. Of 85 males the average was 9lb. 3oz. The largest male in this group weighed 13lb. 8oz., but there are records of some a good deal more than that."

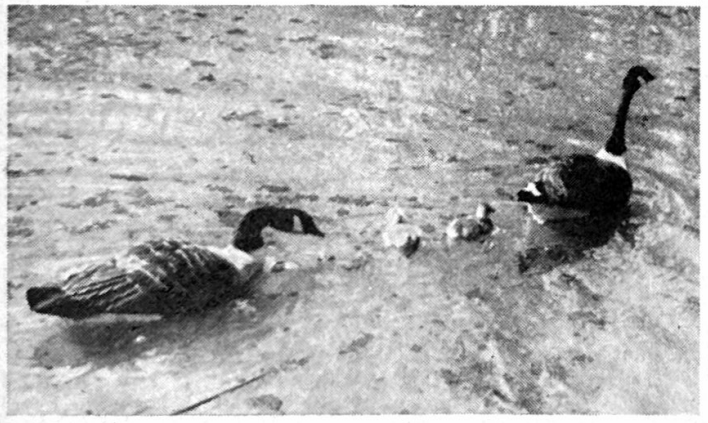
L. M. Kilmister,
Silton, Saskatoon.

OVER-AND-UNDERS

Sir,—At a recent big clay pigeon shoot, at which at least 40 guns attended, I noticed that at least half the weapons used were Continental automatics, or else Continental over-and-unders. Admirable though these guns are, they still are not as good as a British gun.

Surely the time has come for our gunmakers to "get cracking" and give us weapons at the same price to compete with these foreign guns, particularly over-and-unders.

B. P. Moss,
Chester.



The gander directs one of a "brood" of two into line. (See letter "Canada Geese.")

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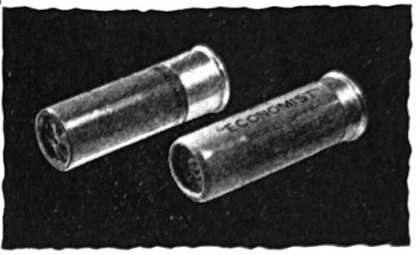

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Clay Pigeon Shooting

Reports and Results

Following are the results of the 52nd Annual English Open Down-the-Line Championship Meeting, held at Northolt, Middlesex, on June 3 and 4 (after ties had been shot off).

First Day. Dougall Memorial Event (100 birds), open: 1st, E. Fear, 196 points ex 200; 2nd and Ladies Cup, J. Wheater, 194. Class A: 1st, L. S. Boyland, 194; 2nd, W. R. Skewes, 193; 3rd, W. Heald, 193; 4th, R. D. Browning, 192; 5th, P. Stanbury, 191. Class B, Gale Memorial Cup: 1st, D. M. R. Jones, 185; 2nd, H. W. Tidd, 185; 3rd, D. H. Finer, 184; 4th, J. Pearson, 180; 5th, F. R. Readhead, 177. Class C, Readhead Bowl: 1st, R. T. Akers, 166; 2nd, R. Blacklock, 163; 3rd, A. E. Halsey, 154; 4th, T. G. Dennett, 153; 5th, C. Sinclair, 151. Gunmakers' Cup: Beverley and District Gun Club, 385 points ex 400 (J. Wheater and R. J. Cooper). Dewar Shield: Blandford and District Gun Club, 925 points ex 1,000 (W. J. C. Bassett, A. J. Beal, L. S. Boyland, W. N. Brock and W. R. Skewes).

Second Day. English Open Championship (100 birds), open: 1st, J. Wheater, 194; 2nd and J. Halawar Cup, P. Stanbury, 193. Class A: 1st, E. Fear, 193; 2nd, F. Lunn, 193; 3rd, W. T. Jones, 192; 4th, C. R. Booth, 190; 5th (shared), W. Heald and W. Forsyth Whaley, 189. Class B, Referee Cup: 1st, R. Love, 189; 2nd, W. R. Rosenwerth, 183; 3rd, K. P. Taylor, 180; 4th, H. B. Smith, 180; 5th, A. Heald, 180. Class C, Readhead Cup: 1st, R. Blacklock, 172; 2nd, T. G. Dennett, 169; 3rd, E. L. Long, 165; 4th, G. A. Purser, 159; 5th, R. T. Akers, 157. Veterans' Cup: R. J. Cooper, 92 points ex 100. Colts' D-T-L Championship: D. M. R. Jones, 96 points ex 100; 2nd, J. R. Hall, 77; 3rd, M. Gillett, 57. North v. South: Winners, South, 3,667 points ex 4,000 (North, 3,662). International Shield: Winners, England A, 948 points ex 1,000 (L. S. Boyland, W. Heald, E. Fear, W. R. Skewes, and J. Wheater. Captain, L. T. Field). High Gun of the Meeting (200 birds): 1st, E. Fear, 389 points ex 400; 2nd, J. W. Wheater, 388.

* * *

London Gun Club. Thirty-three competitors turned up on May 28, to shoot for the White City Cup and Home Counties D.T.L. Championship the Chipperfield Team Trophy, the London and Middlesex Championship and the London Gun Club Open Event. They came from Cornwall, Devonshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Bucks, Kent, Surrey, Middlesex and the London districts. The Club's thanks are offered to those hardy enthusiasts who travelled so far.

The office was in charge of the very efficient Mr. Peter Page, ably assisted by Mr. A. Lovett, the Club's accountant. Messrs. F. Dance, S. C. Hellis and A. E. Newman discharged the duties of referees with distinction, and catering, which proved to be very popular, judging by the amount of food and cuppa's consumed, was ably conducted by Mrs. P. Stanbury and Mrs. Willis. To both, we offer our very grateful thanks for their untiring efforts and efficient services.

Mr. E. Fear, the winner of the Dougall Memorial Trophy, and also winner of the High Gun at the 52nd English Open Down-the-Line Championship Meeting at Northolt.

Light for the day was very poor indeed, but high scores were registered in spite of this. The prizes were graciously presented by Mrs. S. C. Hellis, the wife of our popular and hard working president, who was the recipient of three rousing cheers, followed by a Bisley Whisper from the diehards of that esteemed club. Winners were as follows:—

White City Cup: 1, W. F. Whaley, 191x200 points; 2, H. B. Readings, 189x200; 3, P. Stanbury, 188x200 (after tie shoot with E. C. Ledger). Chipperfield Team Trophy: 1, Bisley Gun Club, 881x1,000 points; 2, London Gun Club, 876x1,000; 3, Blandford Gun Club, 844x1,000. Winning team: H. B. Readings, H. Tidd, R. T. Akers, E. C. Ledger, B. H. Caesar. London and Middlesex D.T.L. Championship: 1, W. F. Whaley; 2, P. Stanbury. Novice prize, not awarded. London Gun Club Open Event over 1st 50 birds. Class A: 1, E. C. Ledger, 97x100 points; 2, W. F. Whaley, 97x100 (after tie shoot); 3, P. Stanbury, 94x100. Class B: 1, H. Tedd, 91x100; 2, R. J. Cooper, 84x100; 3, L. H. Willis, 80x100. Class C: 1, R. T. Akers, 74x100; 2, G. E. Fish, 70x100; 3, A. E. Halsey, 69x100. Optional Sweepstake, Class A: 1, W. F. Whaley; 2, H. B. Readings; 3, E. C. Ledger, P. Stanbury (divided). Class B: 1, R. J. Cooper; 2, L. H. Willis; 3, G. E. Woodford. Class C: 1, G. E. Fish; 2, R. T. Akers; 3, A. E. Halsey.

* * *

Three England teams for the International Tournament in Dublin on June 24-26 have been selected, as follows (in alphabetical order): 1, T. S. Bamber, W. Blamire, C. R. Booth, L. S. Boyland, A. E. Browning, R. D. Browning, B. H. Caesar, R. J. Cooper, E. Fear, W. E. Harris, E. Horlock, S. T. Rimmer, W. R. Skewes, P. Stanbury, J. Wheater.

2, W. J. C. Bassett, A. J. Beal, E. A. Clarke, G. L. Ezart, L. T. Field (Captain), W. L. Harris, W. Heald, E. C. Ledger, F. M. McFarland, A. Poskitt, G. Poskitt, W. J. Sable (Vice-captain), F. J. Sherlock, W. F. Whaley, R. Wilkinson.

3, R. G. Abrey, A. Albrighton, W. N. Brock, D. H. Finer, G. E. Fish, G. A. Freeman, M. L. Freeman, R. D. Gregory, A. J. Kirchen, A. Pratt, F. R. Readhead, K. P. Taylor, H. W. Tidd, L. H. Willis, G. E. Woodford.

Reserves, H. B. Smith, S. Nutt, J. R. Brewer.

(The C.P.S. Fixture List is on page 380)

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

EACH week, as I write my article, I am faced with the same problem—how to deal effectively with letters received from readers since the last article appeared. I have now been writing for *The Shooting Times* for over thirteen years, and it still amazes me how much interest is taken by readers in my particular department, and especially in gundog training and management. For instance, although the rail strike has only been on a few days, I have already had letters from two readers on the subject of sending dogs away under existing conditions.

I do not know if the railways are accepting dogs for transit during the strike (which I hope will be well and truly settled by the time this appears), but I think that it would be extremely unwise to risk sending them away at the present time. If some alternative transport cannot be arranged by road, then it is better to wait until things become normal again. However, the letters do raise interesting points about sending dogs by rail, and I can immediately reassure T.W.D. (Stockport) by saying that, if properly crated, dogs not only travel well and quickly by rail (under normal conditions), but receive every attention *en route* and are almost always delivered quickly to their destination stations.

Boxing of Dogs

The great thing is to box the dogs properly. They can be sent loose—that is, wearing collar, chain and a muzzle, but although this is usually cheaper and in many cases easier, it is not to be recommend, except for comparatively short journeys and where no change of trains will be involved. Nervous dogs should on no account be sent in this way, and even some very meek

A useful travelling box, suitable for one or two dogs.

and mild animals have had their natures radically changed through undergoing the terrors of a long journey in an uncomfortable guard's van on chain and muzzle.

I was once sent for by the local stationmaster to go and remove from the van a large labrador which had managed to get its muzzle off and was standing at bay keeping off all the officials and porters with threatening growls and snarls. The guard's van had been detached from the train and shunted into a siding in order not to delay the train unduly, and everyone concerned was in a positive frenzy.

Screwing up my courage to the sticking point (for the dog was a most fearsome looking beast) I marched up to it, looking much more braver than I felt, and was greeted with a great deal of tail wagging and friendly pawings. The station staff was amazed, and paid tribute to my fearlessness, but the fact was that I had been careful to wear my oldest kennel clothes, smelling strongly of dog's meat, bitches in season and heaven knows what. I did not enlighten the porters, but I am sure in my own mind that the strong smells which must have preceded me were entirely responsible for the success of my "bravery."

The owner of this dog, when writing to me later to thank me, gave the information that since this experience his labrador had been terrified of trains and simply loathed anybody wearing blue serge. As it had travelled from Scotland during a very busy holiday season, there is little wonder that the poor beast had been un-nerved quite considerably.

Dog travelling crates or boxes need not be elaborate affairs, but they should be strong, roomy, and (in order to save expense) as light as possible. The one depicted in the photograph is quite a good one, except for the fact that the wire netting should be of stronger gauge, and brought two labradors to my kennels from Lancashire in comparative comfort. It would not be big enough for two fully-grown labradors. On the other hand, too much room is not desirable in a travelling box, for a highly-strung or nervous dog may well injure itself in a panic by flinging itself about, and once the initial strangeness has worn off most dogs seem happier in boxes which, although large enough to allow them to stand up and turn round in, are snug, warm and fairly dark.

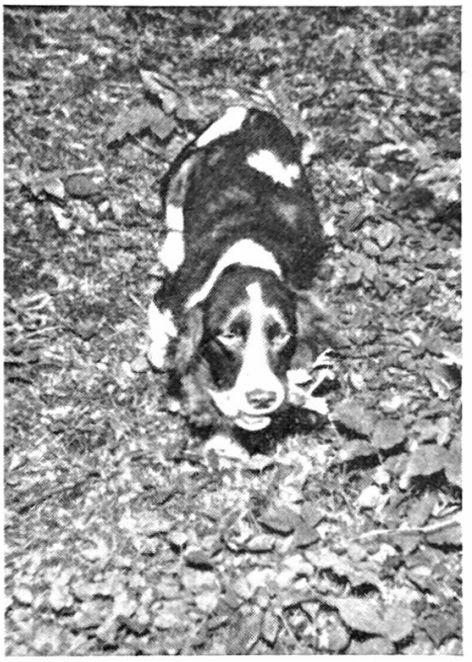
A good straw bed is necessary, but, here again, it should not be overdone. I have known a dog to get strands of straw so tightly twisted round its leg as to stop the circulation and be extremely painful. I do not think that travelling boxes should be locked, for this means that the inmate cannot be given water *en route*, which is most necessary. Food immediately before or during a journey is inadvisable and impractical, but water is essential, and this is usually given not only by kindly guards, but also at the main line termini if change of trains (or transit across London or other large towns) is involved. Dogs travel better at night and for a long journey are best despatched about teatime, and usually then arrive early the following morning, safe and well.

Undesirable Retrieves

Generally speaking, it is not desirable to give young dogs and puppies anything too small to retrieve—anything natural, that is, such as a small bird or a "bolter" rabbit. I have known many dogs which have seriously maltreated small rabbits, and one labrador I was training swallowed one whole, though fortunately without any lasting ill effect upon its mouth. There seems to be much greater temptation to play with and even bite small birds and rabbits than there is in the case of larger ones, and though in later life a dog may be called upon to retrieve snipe and other small birds, practice with starlings or sparrows should not be commenced until the dog is thoroughly reliable with more normal-sized retrieves.

However, there are times when accidents cannot be prevented, and your puppy finds and picks up a small, dead bird (or even a live fledgling) and brings it to you, or perhaps stops and chews or even eats it. This spring there seem to have been a lot of casualties among small birds in my woods—why I know not—and this has proved rather worrying. However, in at least one case it has been distinctly helpful, for a young springer bitch, depicted here carrying the tiny bird, found it when out after the dummy, and has since hunted with great industry every time she has been taken into the wood.

Hitherto this bitch has been a very indifferent hunter, although since puppyhood an excellent retriever, and it seems that scenting



First natural find—a small spaniel with a tiny bird.

and finding the real thing has made all the difference to her. It is rather interesting to consider that although she has several times had dead pigeon and rabbits thrown and hidden for her in cover, this completely unexpected and unarranged for find has done in five minutes what I have been trying to do for weeks.

As I have another spaniel which is reluctant to hunt I hope that something similar will happen in this case with the same satisfactory result. It was fortunate that my long-suffering (but intensely interested) photographer was on hand to record this minor incident in a spaniel's life which may make all the difference to its future as a worker.

Skin Vermin

Although the weather, at time of writing, has been by no means "summery," it has been sufficiently warm to encourage skin vermin in the kennels. Although for some reason my dogs never seem to be troubled by fleas, I do get "outbreaks" of pediculi — lice — among them from time to time. Only yesterday, I noticed a springer scratching his ears violently, and upon examination he was found to be well and truly infested round the head. I had gone over every dog in the kennel only a few days previously without detecting any skin vermin on any inmate, and even now the kennel-mate to the infested dog showed no signs of lice.

However, this was sufficient for me to take steps to prevent a spread of the trouble, and to deal drastically with the pests which had made their unwelcome appearance. I advise all dog owners to be on the alert, for although comparatively easy to deal with, it is not pleasant to have dogs suffering from skin vermin and it must be remembered that these crawling creatures can be the host to disease germs and, in the case of fleas, to tapeworms as well.

Canine Memory

That dogs can have very retentive memories of people was recently brought home to me most forcibly. I had been training a German pointer for six months, during which time the dog had not seen its owner and accepted me as its lord and master; indeed, evincing a very close attachment for me. When the owner came to collect it I was out out and he unwisely entered the kennels and let the dog out and made a fuss of it on the lawn. The next day, when he came to see the dog working, it would hardly respond to me at all, and was only induced to show its paces after much persuasion, and even then kept running back to its master to make a fuss of him. We tried letting the owner handle the dog, but this bewildered it more than ever, and it then started running back to me. I am always careful not to allow a dog to scent its owner or have any attention paid to it by him until after I have demonstrated its training, but on this occasion the damage was done before it could be prevented, and although it has increased my respect for the German pointer as a breed, it was annoying for both owner and trainer and, with a little thought, quite preventable.

Few dogs do remember their owners after four or six months. Indeed, many seem completely to forget them in a considerably shorter time, but if a dog is of thoughtful disposition, a one-man type, and has previously been with its owner a great deal, it is likely to remember him as soon as it scents him, as in the case just mentioned. Owners are sometimes rather hurt by their dog's apparent callousness and forgetfulness, but from the trainer's point of view it is just as well that the great majority of dogs do forget their owners, or at least forget them sufficiently to make for successful training, and these can always be won back later by careful handling, understanding and that vital, but all too often absent virtue—dog sense.

Wildfowling Clubs

Dorset Wildfowlers met for their monthly meeting at The Horse and Groom, Wareham. The secretary informed members that a special general meeting would follow to consider amendments to Club Rules. In the main, that newly proposed members be seconded by a committee member for the purpose of adjudication. Mr. Mathews went on to discuss club matters; salient points being appreciation of the article in the *Dorset Herald*, of the club's activities since its inception and thanks to the newspaper staff for their co-operation. The club's application to the Poole Harbour Board in respect of experimental work to re-introduce *zostera marina* with its incalculable benefits in so doing, to all concerned. Two new members were accepted to the club.

The hon. treasurer's report was then considered and a very stable budget was evident to all. Clay pigeon shooting is now a confirmed success, and the first prize awarded in this direction was won by D. Smith, a keen member and popular winner. Mr. Hoper, a club member, kindly consented to demonstrate his gundogs to the club, and instruct members in dog training and work, as all good wildfowlers should possess good dogs.

The club's outing was provisionally arranged for August 28, when members and wives would be able to enjoy this much-looked-forward-to event.

Committee members had accepted the invitation to meet the South Dorset Bird Watchers' Association to discuss points of mutual benefit. Some discussion on this point took place, and all agreed that the club's policy of co-operation with all would be the keystone to future success.

A founder-member, K. Meadows, instituted an exchange scheme within the club (as shooting men are forever changing items of equipment in their quest for perfection). The idea was considered excellent. A request by the Lytchett Minster Gymkhana Committee for assistance at the clay pigeon stand was considered, and three volunteers, including our chairman, agreed to be present.

Bird Life on a Sewage Farm

(Continued from page 378)

settles down in the hide. The water level is unchanged and a quick glance at a peninsula of mud some 20 yards out from the hide shows that this is still a favourite site. A single little ringed plover, two common sandpipers and a redshank occupy the extreme tip of the ridge of mud while further out a greenshank is feeding freely.

As usual, the green sandpipers are feeding under the shelter of the banks, but in the August haze it is difficult to make an accurate count. The glasses are laid on one side and the telescope is brought to bear on a small flock of waders resting on another strip of mud. Five dunlin and three ringed plover newly arrived since yesterday. Is there anything else new? Two ruffs are picked out from amongst the redshank and a loud *tu-whit!* announces the arrival of a newcomer as a spotted redshank spirals down and lands on the strip of mud in front of the hide. Snipe and lapwing are everywhere.

Two other watchers approach and birds start to leave, led as always by green sandpipers which flush, calling loudly at the first sign of danger. A new note is heard *giff! giff!* as a wood-sandpiper joins the greens.

Glad of the opportunity to stretch our cramped limbs, we crawl from our hide and walk across to talk to the two visitors. They are full of apologies for having disturbed everything, for they had not seen the hide. They reported two black terns and a single black-tailed godwit during the week, but otherwise could add nothing to our list. This is the picture throughout the autumn.

The Settling Tank

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the farm is an old settling tank of some three acres in extent. Over a number of years the thick sludge has formed the foundation for a bed of reeds. Even though this tank does not now form a part of the farm in regular use, under exceptional circumstances water is still diverted into it. This is the part of the farm which receives our attention from mid-October and throughout the winter for it is a favourite spot for jack snipe which feed at suitable mud patches amongst the reeds.

These are the first birds which reach our shores from their northern breeding haunts on the high fjelds of Scandinavian Lapland about the second week of September, but it is not until November that they are present in any numbers. The jack snipe is more plentiful than is generally realised, but owing to the bird's solitary habits, its love of thick cover and the difficulty with which it is flushed it is often overlooked.

Several times we had tried to find a safe route across the black mud to the centre of the reed-bed, but on each occasion we had to abandon the attempt. However, a fortunate meeting with the waterman solved our problem and under his guidance we soon learned to distinguish the treacherous soft patches and avoid the course of the old main stream.

In the winter, following a period of hard weather, the reed-bed supports a surprising variety of bird life. Common snipe start to flush immediately we walk out into the reeds, then a jack. Smaller than the common snipe with a shorter bill the jack rises silently. The flight is leisurely and bat-like and the bird seldom flies more than a hundred yards before it drops again suddenly into cover.

The reeds are full of fieldfares and redwings, and wrens and blue tits seem strangely out of place, while on the firmer patches of mud starlings are feeding noisily in company with pied wagtails and meadow-pipits. Moorhen leave a small open pool followed by a smaller bird from the water's edge. The dangling legs, long bill and weak fluttering flight quickly identify this as a water-rail.

In the fading light a cold mist gradually creeps across the farm, and as we stand under the shelter of the bank talking to the waterman the conversation turns inevitably to the modernisation of the farm. He, too, bemoans the change. Another countryman with a wide knowledge of nature will be displaced. A mechanic will operate the intricate machinery which will control the flow of water over the modern settling tanks. The distant parts of the farm, where the old waterman pauses on his rounds to watch the feeding waders, will remain unvisited. Crops will be growing on the sites of the old settling tanks.

Narcotics and Wild Birds

(Continued from page 377)

the Minister is not necessarily bound by any such recommendations.

Among the many possible regulations that might be put forward something on the lines of the following could perhaps be considered:—

Where it is intended to use narcotic bait, the sporting tenant (or landlord) and his gamekeeper shall be given reasonable notice in writing, stating that a licence has been applied for, and where and when it is purposed to put down the bait. Sufficient time should be given for lodging objections before the actual grant of the licence, and stipulations incorporated in the licence which will meet any such objections and safeguard the sporting tenants' and other people's interests. (The wise farmer will no doubt ask the gamekeeper to use the bait for him; for who would know how to use it to better effect, or who more willing to co-operate? The destruction of pests is one of his main duties in any case).

The amount and type of drug or poison to be used, and the amount of bait to be impregnated shall be specified in the licence, and such specification shall be strictly adhered to.

An account shall be rendered to the Ministry in a return, showing when and where such bait was laid, and the results, together with a statement in full showing what precautions were taken to see that other wild birds did not come in contact with the bait. This statement might have to require the written approval of the local representative of the Advisory Committee and/or the owner of the sporting rights.

The *acquisition* of any bird of game or any wild bird other than those specified in the licence shall be visited automatically with the maximum fine laid down in the special penalty.

Under no circumstances should poisoned bait be permitted against pigeon or any other wild birds that are normally used for human consumption. In no case should a licence be issued in respect of narcotic bait of such a degree that any amount of it could directly cause the death of a wild bird.

Unless this last point is insisted upon, the countryside will eventually become much the poorer, not only for game birds, but also for all our song birds.

NEW BOOKS

Animals My Adventure, by Lutz Heck (Methuen, 18s.). This is a most exciting and unusual book, for it tells of the author's (he was for many years Director of the Berlin Tiergarten) adventures in capturing wild animals in the game territories of Africa and Canada, and of rearing them in captivity. Thus this absorbing story contains all the thrills of big game hunting, plus the added interest of training and studying the animals after their capture.

Among a number of exciting experiences the author describes are a night in Africa when lions broke into the animals' corral; the pursuit of gorillas in dense, primeval forest; lassoing giraffes from horseback; and netting rhinos in the bush. A sad chapter is that in which Dr. Heck gives a harrowing description of his experiences and those of the staff during air-raids. His life's work (and that of his father before him) was almost destroyed in the bombing of the Berlin Zoo in 1943-44.

A particularly interesting section of the book is that in which the author details his experiments in "breeding back" from modern strains to extinct animals like the aurochs and the tarpan, or wild horse, and he claims to have produced animals which are in all respects identical with their remote ancestors. The same technique was successfully used to increase the herds of European bison by introducing Canadian strains. Nevertheless, this chapter is nothing if not controversial, although Dr. Heck writes fully and convincingly on the subject.

The book is illustrated with 31 half-tone plates, the majority of which are first-rate and unusual.

I'd Like to Go Again, by Oswald Lewis (Newman Neame, 15s.). Whether or not the title of this book is a good selling one, being somewhat intriguing, the publishers are no doubt the best judges, but undoubtedly it will attract readers of the author's earlier book, "Because I've Not Been There Before."

The author (M.A., F.Z.S., F.R.G.S.) has been lawyer, soldier, businessman, Member of Parliament, big game hunter, and Master of a City Company. No less than five of his numerous trophies are mentioned in Rowland Ward's "Records of Big Game."

This present volume, like the last, is a travel book by a big game hunter, full of exciting experiences in curious corners of the world. He takes us to parts of India, Africa, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, the Western Isles, Newfoundland, Peru, Chile, Argentine, Jamaica, Madeira, Majorca. And, wherever we find ourselves in his company, depend upon it there is something well worth while to shoot, to catch, to observe, or to think about.

Most exciting of all are his big game experiences in India and Africa; most amusing the chapter on a visit to Russia before the revolution. Quite apart from actual descriptions of big game hunting, and these are both exciting and soundly instructive, the book contains many amusing stories. For instance, there is the one about a man (a big game hunter) accustomed to one set of methods and suddenly confronted with an altogether different technique when he is liable to find that he has fallen foul of the local rules. 'A well-known white hunter in Kenya told me an amusing anecdote of his first and last experience of deer stalking in Scotland. He was home for a holiday and a former client invited him to visit his deer forest. On the first morning the white hunter, coming in very late to breakfast, was greeted by his host with the information that a ghillie had been detailed to take him to a particular glen where he was likely to get a good head. To the astonishment of all present the white hunter replied, 'Oh! Thanks awfully, but I got up early and have already shot two stags. Hadn't someone else better have a try?'"

Every big game hunter, and certainly every potential big game hunter, will find a great deal in this book to interest him. The background of the jungle with its wealth of wild life is well drawn throughout, and hazards and experiences are related with a simplicity that, while denuding them of sensationalism, deducts nothing from their value, be that value excitement or sound advice, humour, or information.

This reviewer has shot only in the British Isles, where the plural of pheasant is pheasants and that of partridge, partridges. He is, therefore, not in a position to criticise the phrasology of sport abroad. As a rule, however, one reads of shooting tiger, leopard, and elephant (being plural nouns). In this present book, the author writes of tigers, leopards, etc., and to this British sportsman, his plurals seem better-sounding than those more commonly in use—strikingly so. But whether Mr. Lewis is shooting tigers, lions, sitting up for panthers, after bison in Kanara, or merely fishing in Finland or Norway, everything he has recorded is well worth reading.

The book is illustrated with a number of good, original photographs.

Eagles, by Leslie Brown (Michael Joseph, 18s.). The author has devoted many years, in Africa and in the Highlands of Scotland, making a close study of, and photographing many species of eagles. In the Highlands, he was one of the first to attempt a census of eagles in particular mountain ranges. Mr. Brown deals fully with the life of eagles—among them, the golden, the snake and fish eagles, and the Bateleur—their hunting methods, flight and speed, foraging range, display and nesting habits, from the buliding of the nest to the parting of the young, as grown birds, from their parents.

A final chapter discusses unsolved problems that have puzzled, and continue to puzzle, eagle enthusiasts. There are nearly 40 photographic illustrations.

Thy Servant the Horse, by Lionel Edwards (Country Life, originally 35s., now in the first cheap edition at 10s. 6d.). This is a book which every lover of horses will cherish, the illustrations alone making it one of permanent value. It is a well-paid tribute to generations of "the willing horse," the roads they have travelled, and the vehicles they have pulled.

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